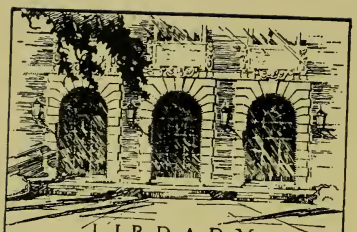

LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

823
P242wo
v.3

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2009 with funding from
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign

http://www.archive.org/details/wortlebankdiarys03leeh

Entwisle

THE

WORTLEBANK DIARY,

AND SOME OLD STORIES FROM

KATHIE BRANDE'S PORTFOLIO.

BY HOLME LEE,

AUTHOR OF "SYLVAN HOLT'S DAUGHTER," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
SMITH, ELDER AND CO., 65, CORNHILL.

M.DCCC.LX.

[*The right of Translation is reserved.*]

823
P242wo
v. 3

CONTENTS

OF THE THIRD VOLUME.

	Page
From the Diary	1
A Sketch from my Window	5
The Lady on the Mall	27
From the Diary	39
A Governess's Soliloquy	46
From the Diary	50
Some Passages from the Diary of Mistress Margaret Arden	56
From the Diary	126
The Poor Pensioner	132
From the Diary	154
Ashburn Rectory	156
From the Diary	338
My Blind Sister	342
From the Diary	363

THE

WORTLEBANK DIARY,

AND SOME OLD STORIES FROM

KATHIE BRANDE'S PORTFOLIO.

From the Diary.

March 18.

We have welcomed Harry, and Harry's wife, and Harry's baby at last. Poor young things, they looked so mournful all in black, but Janet is a sweet creature whom it is impossible not to love, and the boy is a perfect beauty. There is a perpetual scramble for him when he is awake, and Belle amused us all by dashing into the nursery this morning and crying out—"I speak first for the baby;" in the peculiar idiom which children employ when the enjoyment of any commodity depends on who claims it most promptly.

Not a word has been said of the concealment of the marriage, so I trust we have done with that view of the subject for good; if the courtship and wedding had been conducted in the most orthodox and open manner, the results could not have been more satisfactory. Harry remains with us until he is ordained, and then they move into the small thatched house where Dr. Fergus lived before he built his new cottage. It is quite sufficient for them, is pretty and airy though old-fashioned; Hannah proposes to go with them. I would rather not spare her, and I think she might survey the curate's nursery from her own more comfortable quarters here, but Janet places so much reliance on her and has such comfort in her care of the child, that I suppose I shall have to give her up.

Janet is uncommonly pretty, quiet, and ladylike; it would be impossible for her to do or say an ungentle thing. And besides this, she is very intelligent and well read; not accomplished, perhaps, but very conversible, clear-minded, and thoughtful. She will prove an admirable companion to her impetuous young husband, and

Felix and I think we already begin to see some of her good influence over him.

I am very much pleased with the way in which he supported her while still at Oxford: he took pupils—they had nothing from Mr. Hertford. By his will, however, Janet inherits all he left—no great fortune, but enough to free Harry from the necessity of insuring his life for her. The furnishing arrangements at the thatched cottage begin to occupy all our leisure; but there is no need to do very much, for Harry is sure to get some preferment as soon as he is in priest's orders.

His grandpapa wrote him a rather severe letter on his secret marriage, but he had heard the account Mr. Dover gave of Janet, and wound it up by an invitation to him and *his family*, to spend a week at the palace after his ordination; and each of his aunts has expressed her sentiments of mixed satisfaction and displeasure by sending him a substantial contribution to his housekeeping. Miss Rosamund Surtees is to visit us very shortly, for the purpose of making Janet's acquaintance. Miss Rosamund is Emmy's godmother.

Janet was speaking to me of Mr. Hertford this morning in the most affectionate terms. Peculiar as he was, there must still have been something truly good about him. She has brought with her a collection of his papers, for it seems he occupied his leisure in writing, and as the afternoon was rainy and obliged us to stay indoors she read two of his shorter sketches aloud, saying that they would give us a clearer notion of his habits and turn of thought, than any description of hers could do. These sketches were supposed to be taken, the one from the window of his London home, and the other during a summer visit to Old-Port.

A SKETCH FROM MY WINDOW.

I AM a very quiet man, fond of idle dreaming, fond of speculative studies, fond of a great many things that rarely make headway in this practical world, but which fitly furnish forth a life that has been almost blank of incident,—a life that parted with hope early—that may, in fact, be said to have lost the better part of its vitality when Nelly died.

Nelly was not my wife, but she would have been, if she had lived. I can speak of her calmly now, but time was when my very soul sickened for sorrow at her loss; when I would have rushed with eagerness to the grave as a door through which I must pass to behold her dear face again. Sometimes a spasm of anguish thrills me even yet, when I recall her image, as she was when she left me nearly forty years ago; most winning

fair, most beautiful, that image seems, glowing with innocent youth, palpitating with tenderness and joy. Then I ask myself, will she know me? will she love me—*me*, worn old and grey—in that other world, where we two shall surely meet? Will the bright spirit-girl recognize the love of her earthly youth in the man of full three-score years and ten? Will her countenance—will mine—be changed and glorified? The angels cannot be purer than Nelly was: purer or lovelier. I cannot help thinking of this reunion. I cannot help speculating whether she is waiting for me to come to her as impatiently as I am waiting to depart. In the dead of the night I have awakened with a low trembling at my heart, and have been conscious of a strange presence in the room, which faded out of it as I listened breathless for some voice to speak to me—Nelly's voice to cheer me—when sound there was none.

When Nelly died, I was a young man. I had hopes, prospects, interests, even ambitions, in life. But, after that, worldly matters became irksome to me; and worldly prosperity failed me. Friends and acquaintance looked shyly on one who had

not elasticity enough to rise up under the weight of a crushing sorrow; they turned their backs on me; I turned my back on them. Henceforth our ways lay wide apart: theirs, in amongst the struggle, the toil, the great weariness of life; mine, by the quiet waters that flow down peacefully to death. The love of seclusion has grown upon me as moss grows upon a rooted stone; I could not wrench myself away from it, even if I would. Of worldly pelf I have little, but that little suffices me; and, although my existence seems selfish—nay, is so—I lack no interest in my kind. I catch hold of a slight thread of reality, and weave it into a tissue of romance. The facts that I cannot know, imagination supplies me with; and my own temperament, still and melancholy, suffuses the story with a tender twilight hue, which is not great anguish, but which takes no tint of joy.

My abode is in one of the retired streets of London. I know not where a man may be so utterly alone as in this great Babylon. My favourite room has a bay-window overhanging the pavement, and in its cornices, its door-frames, and

its lofty carved mantelshelf, testifies to better days than it is ever likely to see again. The rents in this quarter are low; and though, at certain long intervals, the street is as forsaken and silent as Tadmor in the wilderness, still, the surging rush, the rattle, the hum of the vast city, echoes through my solitude from dawn till dark. I love that echo in my heart. It is company. If I had been a happy, I should have been a busy man—a worker instead of a dreamer. That little IF—that great impassable gulf—between the Actual and the Possible!

I do not begin and end my romances in a day, in a week, in a month, or even in a year, as story-tellers do. The threads run on and on: sometimes smoothly, sometimes in hopeless entanglement. The merest trifle may suggest them; now, it is the stealthy, startled looking back of a man over his shoulder, as he hurries down the street, as if Fate with her sleuth-hounds, Vengeance, and Justice, were following close upon his traces; now, the downcast grey head of a loiterer, hands in pockets, chin on breast, drivelling aimlessly nowhere; again, it is the pitiful face of a little

child clad in mourning; or, it is the worn figure of a woman in shabby garments, young, toilsome, hopeless; or, it is the same figure flaunting in silks and laces, but a hundredfold more toilsome, more hopeless. Occasionally I take hold of a golden thread that runs from a good and a happy life. Such a thread I caught three years ago, and the tissue into which I wrought it is completed at last. This is it:—

I have mentioned my bay-window overhanging the street; in this window is a luxuriously cushioned old-fashioned red settee. By this settee, a solid-limbed table, on which my landlady every morning lays my breakfast, and the newly come-in newspaper. It was while leisurely enjoying my coffee and unconsciously watching the tremulous motion of the acacias which overtop the low garden wall of a house a little higher up the street, that I first laid my hand upon the gleaming thread which shines athwart this grey cobweb romance—cobweb, I say, because so slight is it, so altogether fancy-spun, that perhaps the knowledge of one actual fact of the case would sweep it down as ruthlessly and entirely as a

housemaid's brush destroys the diligent labours of Arachne.

Perhaps it was the quivering green of the light acacia leaves, with the sunshine flitting through and lying upon the pavement like network of gold, that began my romance.

Every Thursday and every Saturday morning, for some months, I had seen a girl come round the street corner, without much observing her. I could have certified that she was tall and lissome in figure, and that she was scrupulously neat in her dress, but nothing further. That morning to which I refer in particular was early in June. The sun was shining in our quiet street; the birds were singing blithely in that overgrown London garden beyond the wall; the acacias were shivering and showering the broken beams upon the white stones as cheerily, as gaily, as if the roar of the vast city were a hundred miles away, instead of floating down on every breeze, filling every ear, chiming in like a softened bass to the whisper of the leaves and twitter of the birds. My window was open, and I was gazing dreamily on the branches above the wall,

when a figure stopped beneath it and looked up; it was the young girl who passed every Thursday and Saturday morning. I observed her more closely than I had yet done, and saw that she was good and intelligent in face—pretty, even, for she had a clear, steadfast brow, fine eyes, and a fresh complexion. As she stood for a minute gazing up into the trees there was a curious, wistful, far-away look upon her countenance, which brightened into a smile as she came on more quickly for having lost a minute watching the acacia leaves. She carried in her hand a roll covered with dark-red morocco, and walked with a decisive step—light yet regular—as if her foot kept time to a march ringing in her memory. "She is a music-teacher, going to one of her pupils," I said to myself; and, when she was gone by, I fell into my mood, and sought an interpretation of that thoughtful upcast look that I had seen upon her face under the trees.

"She was born in the country," I made out, "in some soft, balmy, sheltered spot, where all was pretty in the summer weather. There were acacias there, and these reminded her of them.

Perhaps some one she knew and dearly loved had loved those trees, and she saw in the rippling shadows a long train of reminiscences that I could not see—things past, because her expression was tender, yet things not sad altogether, because a smile succeeded the little wistful look."

After that Thursday morning I watched for her coming twice in the week, each time with increased interest. I always give my dream-folk names, such as their appearance and general air suggest. I gave her the name of Georgie. She seemed to have a certain stability and independence of character which spring out of an early —possibly an enforced—habit of self-reliance. This I deduced from externals, such as that though her dress was always neat and appropriate, it was never fashionable. She looked what women among themselves call nice. I should say her tastes were nice in the more correct acceptation of the word, and by no means capricious. She wore usually a grey shade of some soft material for her dress; and, that summer, she wore a plain silky white shawl, which clung to her figure, a straw bonnet with white ribbon, and

a kerchief of bright rose or blue. Her shoes and her gloves were dainty; and, from the habitual pleasantness of her countenance, I knew that if she were, as my familiar suggested, music and singing mistress, the times went well with her. She had plenty to do, and was well paid.

Her coming was as good as a happy thought to me. Her punctuality was extraordinary. I could have set my watch by her movements those two mornings in each week. I watched for her as regularly as I watched for my breakfast, and should have missed her much more. By whatever way she returned home, it was not by my street. For two full months she came round the corner at ten minutes before nine, and, glancing up at the garden-trees, passed down the opposite side of the pavement, and out of sight. All this time I could not add another chapter to my romance. She had ever the same cheerful brow, and quiet, placid, undisturbed mouth; the same dauntless, straight-looking, well-opened eyes; the same even, girlish step, as regular and calm as the beat of her own young heart. I could but work out the details of the country

home where the rose on her cheek bloomed, and where the erect lithe shape developed; where the honest disposition grew into strength and principle, and where loving training had encouraged and ripened the kindly spirit that looked out at her eyes. Two or three little traits that showed her goodness, I did observe. Never a beggar asked of her in the street whom she did not either relieve or speak to with infinite goodness. I have seen her stop to comfort a crying child, and look after a half-starved masterless dog picking about the kennel for a bone, with a look on her face that reminded me of my lost one—so tender, so compassionate, so true, pure, womanly.

One evening at the commencement of August —it was about half-past six, and all the sun was out of our street—I saw Georgie, as I called her in my own mind, come down the pavement, still carrying the music roll; but not alone. There was with her a young man. He might be a clerk, or a doctor, or a lawyer, or any other profession almost, from his appearance; I could not tell what. He was tall, and certainly

well-looking; but his face was rather feeble, and its complexion too delicate for a man. Georgie seemed his superior, in mind even more than in person. There was a suggestive slouch in his gait, a trail of the foot, that I did not like. He carried his head down, and walked slowly; but that might be from ill-health, or that he wanted to keep Georgie's company longer, or a thousand things rather than the weakness of character with which, from the first glance, I felt disposed to charge him. He was perhaps Georgie's brother, I said at first; afterwards I felt sure he was her lover, and that she loved him.

Three weeks passed. Georgie's morning transits continued as regularly as the clock-stroke; but I had not seen her any more in the evenings, when I became aware that I had the young man, her companion, for an opposite neighbour. From the time of his daily exits and returns, I made out that he must be employed as clerk somewhere. He used to watch at the window for Georgie; and, as soon as he saw her turn the corner, he would rush out. They always met with a smile and a hand-shake, and walked away

together. In about a quarter of an hour he came back alone, and left the house again at ten. This continued until the chilly autumn days set in, and there was always a whirl of the acacia leaves on the pavement under the wall. Georgie did not often look up in passing them now. Perhaps she was thinking of the meeting close at hand.

The young clerk I called Arthur. Now that I had him as a daily subject of study, I began to approve of him more. I do not imagine that he was a man of any great energy of character; and even what little he might have possessed, originally, must have been sapped by ill-health long since; but there was a certain intellectual expression on his pale, large brow, that overbalanced the feebleness of the lower part of his face. I could fancy Georgie, in her womanly faith and love, idealizing him until his face was as that of an angel to her—mild as St. John's, and as beautiful. Indolent and weak myself, what I approve is strength of will, power to turn and bend circumstances to our profit; in Arthur, I detected only a gentle goodness; there-

fore he did not satisfy me for Georgie, who, I said to myself, could live a great, a noble life, and bear as well the strivings of adversity as she now bore the sunshine of young happiness. If I could have chosen Georgie's lover, he should have been a hero; but truth placed him before my eyes too gravely for misconception.

The winter was very harsh, very cold, very bitter indeed; but all the long months I never missed the bi-weekly transits of that brave-eyed girl. She had a thick and coarse maud of shepherd's plaid, and a dark dress now; but that was the only change. She seemed health-proof against the cruel blasts that appeared almost to kill poor Arthur. He was always enveloped in coat upon coat; and, round his throat, he wore a comforter of scarlet and white wool, rather gaudy and rather uncommon; but I did not wonder why he was so constant to its use, when I remembered that it was a bit of woman's work, and that Georgie's fingers had knitted it, most probably.

Ill or well, the winter got over, and the more trying east-winds of spring began. Arthur did

not often issue forth to meet Georgie then, and I believe he had been obliged to give up his situation; for I used to see him at all times of the day in the parlour of the opposite house; occasionally, when the sun was out, he would come and saunter wearily up and down the flags for half an hour, and then drag himself feebly in-doors again. He sometimes had a companion in these walks, on whose stalwart arm he leaned —a good friend, he seemed to be.

"Ah! if Georgie had only loved *him!*" I thought, foolishly.

He was older than Arthur, and totally different: a tall, strong young fellow with a bronzed face, a brisk blue eye, and a great brown beard. The other looked boyish and simple beside him; especially now that he was so ill. The two seemed to have a great affection for each other. Perhaps they had been schoolfellows and playmates; but, at any rate, there was a strong bond between them, and Georgie must have known it.

I remember one warm afternoon, at the beginning of June, I saw Arthur and Robert (that was my gift name to the brown stranger) come

out and begin walking and talking together up and down the pavement. They were going from the corner when Georgie, quite at an unusual hour, came hurrying round it. She had in her hand one of those unwieldy bunches of moss-roses with stalks a foot long, which you can buy in London streets for sixpence, and she was busy trimming them into some shape and order as she advanced. She reached the door of Arthur's lodgings before they turned; and, just as she got to the step and seemed about to ring, she descried them in the distance. Spy that I was, I detected the blush that fired her face, and the quick smile of pleasure with which she went to meet them as they returned. Arthur took the flowers listlessly. I could see that he was getting beyond any strong feelings of pleasure or pain, through sheer debility. In fact, he was melting away in the flame of consumption as rapidly—to use a homely saying—as a candle lighted at both ends. I wondered, more than once, whether Georgie was blind to his state; for she still seemed as cheerful as ever, and still wore that calm, good expression which

I have mentioned before as a characteristic of her. I believe she was quite in the dark, or else so full of hope that she could not and would not admit a sad presentiment. Arthur stood silent and tired, while Robert and she spoke to each other; and, after a minute or two, he grew impatient and would go in-doors. I thought Georgie looked chagrined as the door shut, and she was left outside. I could not quite interpret that bit. She remained hesitating a second or two, and then started very quickly—as if she had forgotten something—back in the direction from which she had come.

Sometimes in my romances I should like to alter the few certainties that impose themselves as checks on my fancy. I would fain alter here, for instance, and make out that Robert fell instantaneously in love with Georgie, and that poor Arthur was only a cousin for whom she had a quiet, sisterly affection, and nothing more—but I cannot. They were surely lovers, whose hearts were each bound up in the other, and there was a parting preparing for them, such as had severed my darling and me.

The Thursday after the little incident of the moss-roses I missed Georgie for the first time. Could she have passed by earlier, I asked myself? I was certainly late for breakfast. On the following Saturday it was the same. "She has given up her pupil in this direction, or she is ill," I said; but the next week I watched, with an anxiety that quickened every pulse, for her coming. I took up my post on the settee early, and kept my eye on the corner; but never saw her. On the succeeding Saturday I almost gave up my hope; for she was still absent, and I lost many an hour in devising explanations why. But the following Thursday my romance was continued. When I went into my sitting-room and threw up the window, I saw the thin, pale hand of my opposite neighbour holding back the curtain of the window as he lay on his bed, and presently Georgie went by on my side, that his eyes might, for a moment, be cheered as he saw her pass. After that, I often saw the wan face of Arthur at the glass, and sometimes Robert's healthy brown visage beside it. One afternoon, Georgie came, as it were, stealthily to the door

and rang the bell. She had a little basket and some flowers which she gave to the woman of the house, with whom she spoke for a while, and then she went away very grave, downcast, sad. I was sure that she knew at last.

Every day now, two incidents recurred regularly. One was the arrival of the doctor in his green chariot; the other, the arrival of Georgie with her little basket and her nosegay of flowers. She always went in-doors and stayed—sometimes only a few minutes, sometimes an hour or more. At this time my romance got a new light, or rather a new shadow. I began to think that Arthur was all Georgie had in the world; for nobody ever came with her: nobody ever spoke to her, but the woman of the house, and Robert.

Occasionally Robert would come out with her on the door-step, and they would converse together for a little while. It was about Arthur, I knew, from their serious looks and glances up to the room where he lay. I cannot tell how much I felt for Georgie, in the loneliness by which my imagination surrounded her. I began to see in Arthur many virtues, many merits,

which must have made her love him, that I had never seen in him before. His wan face looked patient, his great brow more spiritual than ever, and I was sure she would cling to him with a keener affection as she beheld him passing away. Did I not remember how it had been with me and Nelly?

I suppose when death comes amongst us—no matter how long we have been warned—how long we have used ourselves to think that he might knock at our door any day—his coming appears sudden—unexpected. I rose one morning as usual; and, on looking at the opposite house, saw that the shutters were closed and the blinds all down. Arthur, then, was dead. The milkman came to the door, the baker, the postman with his letters—letters for a dead man!

It was Thursday morning. Georgie would pass early. A little before nine she came, ran swiftly up the house-steps, and rang. At the same moment advanced in another direction the man with the board on which the dead are laid. He was but just gone, then! Georgie stood by to let him pass in before her, and I saw the shiver

that ran through her frame as she watched him up the stairs, and thought what he was going to do. Robert came out to her; his manly face, grief-stricken and pale, was writhing as he recounted to her, perhaps, some dying message from Arthur, perhaps some last token of his love—I know not what.

Nelly's last moments,—Nelly's death over again to me!

Then Georgie came out crying—crying, oh, so bitterly! and in going down from the door she dropped the flowers that she had brought in her hand to gladden eyes that the sight of her would never more gladden on this earth. Robert picked them up; and, after watching her a few minutes on her way, went in again and shut the door. But, in the afternoon, she returned and went up-stairs to see what had been her lover. It is good to look at the cast-off mould of what we love; it dissevers us so coldly, so effectually from their dust. It forces us to look elsewhere for the warm, loving soul that animated it. There is nothing in that clay that can respond to us. That which we idolized, exists elsewhere.

Every day—sometimes at one hour, sometimes at another—Georgie came to the opposite house, was admitted by Robert, and visited the relics of her beloved. She seemed to be more than ever alone; for, even in these melancholy comings and goings, she was always unaccompanied. On the sixth day from Arthur's death, there was a funeral; and Georgie and Robert were the only mourners who attended it. Seeing the girl in her black clothing, white and tearful, I said,—

"She did love him, and I hope she will stay—for his sake—a widow all her life!"

The Thursday and Saturday morning transits were now resumed. Georgie looked graver, loftier, more thoughtful; like a woman on whom sorrow has lighted, but whom sorrow cannot destroy. Robert left the opposite house and sometimes my fancy went home with the poor, lonely girl, and I wondered whether she had any friend in the world who was near to her and dear to her now.

For upwards of six months I never missed her with her roll of music twice in the week; but, at the end of that time, she suddenly ceased to

appear in our quiet street, and I saw her no more for a long time. I thought that this romance of mine, like many others, was to melt away amongst the crowd of actualities; but, yesterday, behold! there came upon me its dramatic conclusion. Georgie and Robert—he strong and handsome as ever, she fair and lovely, and wearing garments that had the spotless air of belonging to a new bride—came like a startling sunbreak into its gloom. They paused opposite the house where Arthur died, seemed to recall him each to the other, and then walked on silently and more slowly than before; but before they turned the corner I could see Georgie smiling up in Robert's face, and Robert looking down on Georgie with such a love as never shone in Arthur's cold, spiritual eyes.

For an instant I had a little regret—a little anger against her—but it passed. Let Georgie live her life, and be happy! Did I not at the first wish that Robert—and not Arthur—had been her choice?

THE LADY ON THE MALL.

Wherever I go I carry with me my speculative fancies about things and people that I see. Perhaps it is a diseased or morbid state of mind superinduced by much solitude; but whether or no, I do not care to be delivered from it, as it is company for me, and engrosses me as completely as I have observed that most chronic physical ailments engross their owners. I am looking out upon the Mall at Oldport, the pleasantest walk in the outskirts of this garrisoned place, where I am located for a change and holiday. Its ancient trees form a dreamy shelter from the fierceness of the summer sun, which the lovely fields and open downs lack. Give me shade and the sun shining beyond for enjoyment; a glow just stirred by the air amongst the leaves; not the blinding tropical glare in

which I see some people revel—one lady especially—a lady to whom, from her unfailing daily appearance there, I have given the name of the Lady on the Mall.

At one particular point of this public promenade, about half-a-dozen of the stately, full-foliaged elms have been removed—perhaps by natural decay—but as probably by some violent storm; and all the blaze of noon seems to concentrate itself on the bare spot. It is a bit of arid desert in a land of greenness; the grass of the bank is scorched brown, the sandy path is parched and cracked; yet just there, when the heat is most fervent, and everybody else is glad to creep into any place for shelter, comes out the Lady on the Mall to bask and sun herself.

I noticed her from the first day that I entered on my lodgings. Soon after twelve had struck by the church clock which regulates all the clocks in Oldport, I saw her advancing slowly under the trees until she reached the open space; and there she sat down, and stared at the dazzling sky for an hour or so; after which she rose and walked back in the direction from whence she had come.

That glowing atmosphere burnt on for a week, deepening in intensity daily; but regularly, as the hour drew round, appeared the Lady on the Mall. That week was succeeded by stormy weather; a terrible tempest broke over the district, and left behind skirmishing troops of clouds which dissolved in sudden showers of extraordinary violence. But the rain did not keep the lady in-doors. She was out on the Mall just as usual; only, instead of resting on the bank, she walked to and fro.

It was in the course of one of these heavy showers that I obtained my first close look at her face. I was sitting at the open parlour window (for the wet drove the other way), when she came past and looked in. I do not hold with that popular delusion of my sex, that every woman who casts her eyes upon me does so with nefarious designs on my affections, or that a frank, good-humoured manner is a guileful trap laid to catch my unwary hand; so, when the lady passed and looked in with a pair of remarkable eyes, instead of hastily concealing myself, I looked after her with some astonishment that she should choose

such weather for her walk. She stopped and gazed through the iron railings across the bit of garden straight at me, and then I perceived that, in those large remarkable eyes of hers, there was no longer any charm for the heart of man: the Lady on the Mall was mad. Touched with pity, I called out to ask her if she would come in for shelter until the rain was over. She shook her head; but I pressed my invitation more kindly; yet she only smiled, sighed, and spreading out her hands with a gesture of indifference, replied,—

"Thanks, sir, but I can bear the rain. Still, did I hear aright—that you asked me under your roof?"

I answered, Yes; that I should be very glad if she would come in and rest; but, after another prolonged stare, she smiled, sighed, and spread out her hands again, saying,—

"Oh, I don't mind the rain at all. Thanks. Neither the wind nor the rain. I have been out in worse than this; much worse than this."

She did not attempt to move on, but was obstinate about not sheltering. She stood and

watched me through the railings until every garment she wore clung to her with wet. Perceiving that she was determined not to come in, I suggested to her the propriety of going home.

"I will go when it is over," said she, shuddering.

I told her I did not think that it would be over for a long time; it looked like a day set in for wet.

"Oh, the rain? I did not mean that," replied she. "Oh, no; the execution."

She then made me a polite bow, and walked forwards towards the town: as one o'clock struck she came back, and, stopping in the same place, said,—

"Ah, sir, they have taken his body down—he is dead now;" after an instant's pause, she grasped one of the rails, and shook it, exclaiming vehemently: "Jealousy is the devil!" and then started off up the Mall.

Here was the germ of some mysterious tragedy, before the facts of which speculation recoiled, baffled. She seemed to be from forty to forty-

five years of age, with a tall, graceful air and shape; her features were thin to emaciation, but regular; and her eyes were black as midnight, with an insane light in their depths, now dreamy, now glittering. Her hair was perfectly grey, and she was dressed in plain, grave colours, like half mourning. She had the general aspect of belonging to the educated classes of society, and spoke with a correct accent and rather pleasant intonation. When she clutched the railing, I had observed upon her hand the glitter of a wedding-ring.

Most idle persons are inquisitive; I am inquisitive; but more, I think, from habit than nature: still the result is the same. This poor lady's ways, words, and appearance excited my curiosity vividly, and the next time my landlady made her appearance in my room, I asked,—

"Can you tell me who that lady is who comes out upon the Mall every day about noon?"

"Oh, she is crazy, sir; she is a Mrs. Bond; and folks do say that her husband was hanged as much as six and twenty years ago. I can't undertake to speak to the truth of it myself, but

that is what I've heard. She is well enough off for money, and lives up at Doctor Cruse's. She came there a young widow as long since as I tell you—better than six and twenty years."

I had, I thought, no right to penetrate further; but, out of these prominent though slender outlines, my imagination sought to construct a complete and finished edifice. That white, worn face became rejuvenated with the bloom of seventeen; those passionate eyes beamed with innocent love; that grey hair crowned the sweet brow with grape-like clusters; those dry, haggard lips swelled with the rosy warmth of budding youth—above all, that maiden heart had not branded upon it, in unavailing remorse and sorrow, that keynote of her history, Jealousy is the Devil. I saw her happy in a happy home; the vivifying sunshine of the family; quick of temper; lavish of affection and exacting of it too; proud in character, brilliant of intellect, witty of speech, generous of hand; a beautiful human creature; faulty, but capable of great things, either for good or for evil, as the temptations of life might turn. The grand crisis of woman's existence had not taxed her

strength with any disappointment: she loved, and she had love at her desire. Happy days of courtship, whose slight showers only served to brighten the sunshine, floated over her in blessed calm. I have a tender sympathy for all young creatures dwelling in this sweet May-month of life; it pleases me inexpressibly to watch the shy delights, the quick alarms, that tremble like sun and cloud on the opening flowers of love; I like to see them gathered tenderly and stored for their enduring sweetness in two hearts united; but to see them rudely torn up and scattered to the winds, or trampled down with reckless feet, or blasted by an east wind of pitiless misfortune, makes my soul shiver; rather let them blossom, as blossom all the passion flowers I ever loved, upon a solitary grave.

Let me trace this girl's story on. No doubt remains with me that she gave her whole soul with her love; hers was no stinting nature, as I read it in those gloomy eyes; it was bountiful, and warm, and mellow as July. Yes, I think once it was as a rich inexhaustible treasure, from which might have been gathered by a hand

faithful as well as tender the heart sustenance of a long, long life; but, it was a hand worse than wasteful, that could pull down its safe enclosure, and let in upon the ripened harvest such a sea-flood of suffering and wrong as had made her soul desolate for ever, as a land sown with salt. I see her passing forward from the gentle, all-hoping, all-believing time of maidenhood, to the fair, blushing bride, sweet, loving wife—never, oh, never a mother! That holy grace came not to her, else there would not be that fatal fire-mark on her heart to-day: Jealousy is the Devil!

A little while of the great, the intense happiness, and then, methinks, I see a weariness in the lover-husband, a distrust in the young wife, and a cloud rising, lightly at first, but deepening and increasing until it becomes a blackness of darkness for ever. She is on the watch, always on the watch. Every bright, captivating woman's face he lets his eyes rest on for a moment is to her more dreadful than a basilisk's. At first, all women; then one woman in particular, is her deadly rival. He can mock at her pain; he can

parade his power, he can show her others, and fairer than herself, dwelling on his words, courting his approval and admiration. He thinks it is a little thing to stab a wife's heart with pin pricks every day; she will never die of the torture—women, wives especially, are so patient. Patient? Yes, patient, if they cease to love; but, where that survives—Jealousy is the Devil!

Every tender sentiment, every gentleness of woman-nature, is scorched and withered under its deadly heat. Amongst their blackened relics, and under that furnace glow, but one plant will thrive and blossom—that plant is Revenge, and its fruit is Death.

In her passionate heart it grew and blossomed fast. He had dangerous secrets: the law should be her bloodhound, and hunt him down. She, to whom he was unfaithful, she at whose remonstrances he laughed, would set it on his traces. He should be broken from her rival. He should be at her mercy. Revenge conceives designs quickly, and will not tarry ere it brings them forth. He is betrayed. She, who would once have died for him, is his betrayer. Did she

think, I wonder, did she ever think, that she was betraying him to his death? In the name of womanhood, I hope not!

He is in prison now, and already repentance stings her. He will not see her when she goes to his cell. He will send her no message, and he will receive none. He knows who has wrought his destruction. She was pitiless for him, and he will be pitiless for her. The day of trial comes: she cannot bear witness against him, or for him, but others have his secrets who can, and she may listen while each link of evidence is added on, and repentance harasses her in vain. It is over. They tell her he is to die. She hears the doom pronounced. Then, and then only, do his eyes meet hers, and in them such an agony of dread, reproach, and misery lightens, as she cannot endure to see. She is seized with a sudden frenzy, and cries: "I have killed my husband: Jealousy is the Devil!"

She entreats that she may kneel at his feet, and be forgiven; but his answer to her prayers is always, "No." Others he will receive, but her he repels with detestation. The terrible interval

is past, the death-day is come. She has not seen him. She is in despair. She escapes from those who watch her, and hangs on the skirts of that awful crowd. She is quite, quite mad now. She can bear to listen to the bell that tolls for the dying. She can bear to listen to the coarse comments. Who could, that was not mad? For the penalty of her great sin, every day at noon her diseased imagination reproduces the scene of her husband's death, with no ghastly detail omitted.

What his crime was, speculation passes over; he died thus, and her jealousy killed him. Her punishment is by far the more terrible, and her sin was the greater.

Ah me! what sorrow there is in the world! How pale and colourless are these shadows I have made from fancy of this grand tragedy of a woman's life. We see the rack; but our limbs must lie on it, wrenched and broken, ere we can estimate its torture, as our soul must writhe in remorse unavailing, and the quickest pangs that human feeling can endure, ere we can appreciate that daily outcry of the Lady on the Mall.

From the Diary.

April 27.

Spring is opening on us brilliantly, the season is glorious. Harry preached his first sermon in Wortlebank Church last Sunday, and to-day Felix, Emmy, Belle, Miss Mostyn, and I, have been dining with the young couple, by way of house-warming.

The entertainment went off in a highly satisfactory manner, and it is clear to see, from the simple perfection and orderliness of everything about the house and the table, that Janet has an eye to the details of her household, as every clergyman's wife, and, indeed, every wife of the middle class should.

Emmy and Janet have during the last month been taking practical lessons of my cook in the

finer branches of the art culinary, so that Belle says her dinners have been like the day after company for so long that she does not like coming down to her plain mutton and pudding again now that Janet is gone. The pair between them spoilt and misused a considerable quantity of excellent materials, but I had the satisfaction of informing cook on my return home that the lamb was roasted to a turn, the castle puddings perfection, and the jelly as clear as crystal. Cook inquired after the soup and the dressing of the potatoes: the former I told her to appeal to her master about, as I did not taste it; but the potatoes were correct; on which she said it was not every young woman who could boil a potato, and that was the first thing *she* should set a kitchen maid to do who came as candidate for a cook's place. Then she added that it was not expedient to teach a girl too much at first, or she grew "uppish and conceited, and was for bettering herself directly;" but let her do plain cooking, and let the missis put her own hand to "company things" until she had got settled with her thoroughly.

I have no doubt of Janet's guiding her house comfortably, or of Emmy guiding hers well when she goes to it, for neither of them is lazily disposed, which is the great mischief with some wives; and neither of them is troubled with the absurd pride of disliking to superintend what is needful to be done.

Felix and I are both of opinion that we shall have to look out for a new governess for Belle after midsummer. Miss Mostyn has been particularly bright, gay, and conversational of late, and Dr. Fergus makes frequent occasions to "drop in" at the hours when she is known to be in the drawing-room; also Belle has incidentally remarked more than once that they have met the doctor in their walks, and immediately Belle mentions it Miss Mostyn breaks into conversation on a totally irrelevant subject.

Dr. Fergus is a very worthy man, and she is a very kind, sensible woman, and nice looking

too; and I shall be glad if they do make a match of it: I do not think either could do a wiser or better thing.

To-day Belle, with a rather mischievous sparkle in her bright eyes, invited me to the school-room for a short reading, as there was only Miss Mostyn besides herself; and when we were comfortably arranged, she said that she was going to give us "A Governess's Soliloquy." I did not remember having ever written anything of the kind, and Miss Mostyn's sudden exclamation, "O Belle! where have you found that? give it to me immediately!" informed me that the lucubration was not mine but hers.

She was very anxious to extricate it from Belle's fingers, but Belle is full three inches taller than her governess; and, laughing merrily, she held it high up out of her reach, pleading that the sentiments it expressed were altogether right, proper, and natural, and had greatly increased her respect for her instructress.

"It is nonsense, Belle; I wrote it long ago when I was quite young; pray give it up!" urged Miss Mostyn, pathetically.

"No; mamma will like it; I like it," replied her rebellious pupil. "It shows you under a new light. I always thought you rather solemn, and demure until I read it, and now I know you are no wiser than other people, which is nice."

"I hope it will not lead you to disregard my authority, Belle," said Miss Mostyn, with seriousness.

"Oh, no; it has increased my awe of you. Listen, mamma; this is a young governess's true thoughts."

"Don't be foolish, Belle; I ought to have burnt it long since; let me put it into the fire now;" and Miss Mostyn stretched out an eager hand for the purpose, but Belle firmly withheld it.

"No," said she, shaking her head; "there is a mistaken notion abroad about governesses; when I have read it to mamma, I shall carry it to Mrs. Harding's, and read it to her and recommend her to lay it to heart, for I heard her tell Fanny yesterday——"

"No gossip, Belle!" interposed Miss Mostyn softly, and Belle was checked at once.

After a little more raillery and argument, Miss Mostyn suffered her wilful charge to have her way, and the "Governess's Soliloquy" was read accordingly.

A GOVERNESS'S SOLILOQUY.

I WISH all the grammars, the dictionaries, the Learning-made-Easys, were buried under the biggest pyramid that ever was built; or cast into Etna, tied to the heaviest relic of antiquity yet discovered; or lying with the fragments of Pharaoh's chariots at the bottom of the Red Sea; or flung irreclaimably into the lowest deep of the limbo of oblivion! I do; I feel vicious, perfectly vicious!

Oh dear! How sick I am of making the mild inquiry as to when America was discovered, and by whom; of asking who built Carthage; how Rome was peopled; what are the names of the nine Muses; how candles are made; who Galileo was; what an adverb is; and how many ounces

avoirdupois go to the pound. I have been starving on this milk for babes more years than I care to count, tightened up in a mental strait-jacket which aggravates all the natural asperities of my character. I have horrible nightmares of Rhodian Colossus, and Labours of Hercules, and Wonders of the World, and Wise Men of Greece—all struggling *pêle-mêle* on my bewildered brains; in my dreams I am perpetually being set up for public examination, and forgetting my dates.

When I go into the woods, every glade falls into accurate perspective; the winds keep on saying detestable hissing French verbs; the tiny blooms, couching amongst leaves and moss, lift up their heads and preach of field botany; the very birds sing in time, and some impudent magpie does the counting—"one, two, three, four—one, two, three, four—one an', two an', three an', four an'." Even the sun, which might be expected to shine in a liberal sort of way, is to me only a vast spherical body, surrounded by a luminous atmosphere, and the centre of the solar system.

I am a denizen of the elements, a dweller in

past ages; I never shall emerge into the present—*never!* I don't know what is going on in the world any more than Sterne's starling did; I am caged up fast, and can't get out! I can't get out!

If anybody speaks of "the War," it suggests the Punic or the Peloponnesian, or the Servile, or the Seven Years', or the Peninsular War: is "the Emperor" alluded to, Napoleon the Great immediately asserts himself, or perhaps Augustus Cæsar!

Then the children—darlings, possessed of the germ of every virtue, but subject to little hallucinations from which no power of speech can deliver them. The articles of their faith are, that I am their natural enemy; that I object to holidays; that my prime pleasure lies in finding out more faults than there are in dictations and exercises; in misinterpreting, of *malice prepense*, undotted *i's* into *e's*; that I turn imperfect lessons for the satisfaction of hearing them again; and that I should expire of *ennui* if I were restrained for a week from expounding arithmetical problems.

Oh, you blessed darlings! You make a grand mistake. I don't like lessons one bit more than you do, and I delight in holidays. Not in *prim* holidays, though, when best frocks are donned, and I am charged to take care you don't spoil them. No! give me ease, and an unspoilable gown; then, away into the depths of woods, where nuts grow in rich clusters, and the moss is like velvet, and the air like balms of Paradise; away into green lanes, hedged with wild rose and fragrant honeysuckle; by singing rivulets, into quaint old villages, with ivied ruins, and ancient women overflowing with legends and country superstitions. Ah! then I can get out of the echo of rules and exceptions, and forget, while the day lasts, that I am "the governess!"

There! I have been wired down for six months, effervescing rebelliously; now I have boiled over, and am ever so much relieved. Two o'clock. Enter children.

"Now, my dears, let us set to work, and do our best. Amelia and Lucy, write your French exercises; Helen, go and practise your scales; Tom, finish that long-division sum which would

not come right in the morning; Polly, take up your sewing; and Willie, bring your *Parents' Assistant,* and let me hear you read. Silence. No talking."

From the Diary.

May 19.

The weather is so bright, beautiful, and settled, that to-morrow, Emmy, Miss Mostyn, Belle, and I are going away to the sea-side for a few weeks. Belle grows fast, and Dr. Fergus recommends sea air.

We were long divided between Crofton and Kirklands, but the decision is Kirklands, so we shall pass through Eversley on our way, and stop a few hours to show Belle the Minster and the Old Maids, and the other interesting bits of the town which she will like to see. I shall like to see them again myself too.

Our previsions respecting the Scotch doctor and Miss Mostyn are true; she is to be married from Wortlebank in July when Steenie is at home, and Belle is to be her bridesmaid, to her infinite

delight; they are to visit the doctor's relations in the North for a week or two and then to settle in the new house;—Belle is glad she shall keep "Mossy" so near at hand, and hopes her new governess may be only half as nice. She has set to work on a gay embroidered cushion, which is to be, I understand, her wedding present, and Emmy is to do the fellow to it.

I suppose there would not be many regular lessons now, so perhaps it is best to break away from them altogether and enjoy a complete holiday. Felix will go to and fro: and Janet is to come to us with Harry for a fortnight.

Kirklands, May 22.

We are at last comfortably settled in our seaside lodgings, fronting the sea, which lies like a lake in the May sunshine. The young ones have gone out to enjoy the sands, and I am left for an hour or two alone.

We stayed two days in Eversley and enjoyed them exceedingly—I always have a hankering after the old home. Belle's delight was enthu-

siastic in the Minster, and she walked me about it and the town until I was ready to drop. Under her persuasion even, I penetrated into Percie Court and went through the house—then we walked to the church outside Friargate and saw my mother's and father's graves. The hand of modern improvement has been at St. Mark's too as well as elsewhere, but the place of the dead has been respected.

We visited Miss Bootle, of course, and she generously endowed Belle with a white kitten, a descendant of my old friend Charlie, which has done nothing but get into mischief since it came, and is, at this moment, while I write, clawing into hopeless tangle the gay wools which Belle has brought to finish the cushion for Miss Mostyn.

Last evening we all toiled up the steps to the churchyard on the cliff where Isabel was buried—poor Isabel! All that sad, sad time came over me so vividly as I sat there and looked over the sea. In the house where she died, nobody lives now but one woman to exhibit it to strangers; it looks very forlorn and desolate, and

more ruinous than when I knew it years ago.

In the modern part of the town, Kirklands is enlarged and improved; we are domiciled in the centre house on the esplanade, all of which is of recent construction.

I feel weary and dull this morning—reviewing old trials is a foolish discipline. I thought I should fill a page or two with interesting details of what we had seen in Eversley, but words will not come while thoughts come too fast, so I will shut up my book and go to meet the children on the sands.

The weather is magnificent; warm and genial as midsummer. We went down below the cliffs to-day and walked a mile or two in the sunshine, while the tide was low, carrying our luncheon in a little basket that we might stay all the day out if we liked it; but about noon, we were most heartily glad to creep up into a young plantation for what shelter it would give us from

the heat, and while there, Belle began, in her beguiling way,—

"Mamie, would it not be pleasant if we had an amusing book to read just now?"

"It would have to be *very* amusing, or I fear it would make me drowse off to sleep, Belle," said I, and so said Emmy and Miss Mostyn too.

"Suppose I had brought one—very particularly amusing, mamie?"

"Suppose you had, Belle, you would wish to read it. Produce your treasure." And to my surprise, she brought forth the old volume she had picked up in the Wortlebank woods.

"I don't know, Belle, that we are justified in reading that," said I, seriously.

"Why, mamie? We have tried to find the owner, and nobody answered the advertisement. Perhaps the person is dead, or gone out of England. Let me read a little bit at the beginning, and you can stop me if I ought not to go on."

I gave a rather hesitating consent when I saw that both Emmy and Miss Mostyn were curious

to know what the book was like, so Belle elected herself as reader, and, perched comfortably between the two forks of a young ash-tree, gave us the following passages from the diary of Mistress Margaret Arden.

SOME PASSAGES FROM THE DIARY OF MISTRESS MARGARET ARDEN.

IN TWO PARTS.

PART I.

June 17, 18—.—Oh! what a weary place is this Holly Bank! Here am I for a three months' visit; and already, after five days, am I dismally haunted by the spirit of dulness. Uncle Joshua, being firmly persuaded in his own mind that new books are not half so good as old ones, does not patronize modern literature, much to my distress. Yesterday I asked him respectfully for something to read—(he keeps his books locked up behind glass-doors)—and he offered me *Johnson's Dictionary.* "There, niece, said he, "study that; most boarding-school misses are deficient in spelling." I accepted the volume with a curtsey,

and handed it to cousin Maria, whom her father has educated at home on new principles: she bristles all over with definitions as a tipsy-cake does with almonds, and talks about philology as ordinary women do of babies. She thanked me, and said of all studies grammar and the construction of languages was to her the most edifying; she does not care for poetry, or romances, or history—indeed, she reminds me of nothing so much as a person who persists in grubbing up the roots of plants, instead of admiring their graceful forms, bright foliage, or rich fruit. But Maria is good-natured notwithstanding her learning; and seeing that I was really likely to fall into mischief purely through idleness, she brought up from the depths of her apron-pocket the key of the book-closet, to which out-of-date pamphlets, magazines, and reviews are exiled; and suggested that perhaps I might find some light reading amongst them. Thither accordingly I flew, and pounced greedily upon a pile of dusty quarterlies; an armful of which I carried off to my sanctum for private consumption. They are as a gold-mine to me: I love

a review—a good one—whether tender, or ferocious, or satirical. From these grey paper-covered tomes I have disinterred some opinions of sterling metal, which, having been tried in the furnace of time, have lost nothing; but now and then I also turn up a clod which only enshrines an earth-worm. I liked especially to find an echo of my own sentiments; but it vexes me more than a little to see poetry which is sweet to me as the sound of many waters sneered at as the veriest doggrel. Ah, well! there are the poets, in green and crimson and purple and gold, behind uncle Joshua's glass-doors; while these slashing reviewers lie mouldy and dusty, given over a prey to the ravages of mice in attic obscurity.

June 18.—I hope and trust some event will turn up soon to stir the slumberous routine of Holly Bank. We don't live, we vegetate, and shall turn into dormice—(dormice or dormouses, which is it? Mem. to ask cousin Maria)—soon, if nothing happens. I have only a further instalment of the reviews for aunt Doe. She will think I have had a very prosy time; and so I

have, thus far; but it is useless to complain. Well, these old books have introduced me to the private life of France as depicted in the memoirs of celebrated people, and anything but a pleasant impression they give of our neighbours' morality: the critic seems to have experienced a righteous pleasure in dissecting these books, in exposing to daylight the hideous ravages of chronic disease, the deformed limb, or the wilful warping of what might have grown straight; no decent raiment is permitted to shroud the moral decay of life and truth; it is made to stand before us stripped of its masking garments, horrible as the loathly lady in the old rhyme. Madame du Châtelet, Madame du Deffaud, and many other madames of more wit than wisdom, enliven the dreary mass with smart sayings and doings. How long will it be ere order is educed from this moral chaos? If I can do nothing else at Holly Bank, I can get up an epitome of ancient literature that will astonish aunt Doe. I wonder how they all are at Darlston; I have not heard from my father since I left home; *I will write to-morrow to the little ones.*

June 24.—An arrival at Holly Bank,—Mr. Matthew Constant, who is to marry cousin Maria: a little man—mousy face, soft hair, and sleek undertoned manner. It is great fun to see how he obeys Maria: I am sure she ordered him to propose to her—he never could have dared to do it without prompting. Anybody to watch them might think they had been ten years married. There is none of what Maria calls "foolish philandering" between them; it is all systematic, business love-making. Mr. Matthew has several little peculiarities of pronunciation which offend Maria's correct ear mightily; though they give her opportunities of displaying her erudition, and airing her roots and derivations. I am glad my father did not think it necessary to have me cultivated so highly.

Last night, while Maria and I were looking over some beautiful gown-pieces which Mr. Matthew has brought from town for her, I asked a question which has been in my mind ever since I saw him,—what could first have put it into her head to think of marrying him? and she replied, with the most artless candour—

"Why, Margaret, I suppose I must be married some day; and as he asked me, and there was nothing against him, I thought I might as well get settled at once. The little man is very well worth having; his income is larger than my father's, you know."

"And do you love him?" This question was, I confess, put in rather a mocking, incredulous spirit, and Maria took me up smartly.

"Love and stuff!" she ejaculated. "What has love to do with it? I am going to be properly married, and of course shall love Matthew: but I don't like nonsense."

The very idea of nonsense as connected with cousin Maria is profanation: her sharp face looked so much sharper at the mere possibility of any being inflicted upon her, that I was fain to make a laughing apology for my indiscretion in suggesting it.

"Your head is full of romance, Margaret," said she, grandly; "by the time you are my age, it is to be hoped that you will be more practical."

"I hope I shall *not;* I'll never marry anybody

unless I love him with all my heart and all my soul, never."

Maria is getting old—quite six-and-twenty—and she is not pretty; but she is too nice for Mr. Matthew Constant. She ought to know what she likes, however. One thing is certain, she would not make a nice kind old maid like aunt Doe; and she *may* make a good wife: I don't know.

June 26—Yesterday to an archery meeting at Danby Grange; it was very gay and pleasant, though nearly all the people were strangers to me. Danby is a grand house: its master is a bachelor,—not very young,—who has travelled the world over, and who is very scientific. I thought him proud and stiff, but he is not generally disliked; Charlotte Petersham said she was ready to swear obedience to him at any moment on his rent-roll. Charlotte is going to marry a lieutenant in a marching regiment, and neither of them has sixpence; but I like this sort of marriage much better than Maria's, who calls them love-sick geese.

The first prize was won by Mr. Danby him-

self—a beautiful silver arrow—and he gave it to me: because, I suppose, I had no chance of winning one for myself, and was an uncome-out-girl. Uncle Joshua said it was a compliment: all the men gave their prizes to some lady. Mr. Matthew shot, I know not how many times, in hopes of having a trophy to present to Maria; but he could not even hit the target, and she said he made quite a simpleton of himself by trying, for he had never, to her certain knowledge, handled a bow before. There was a dancing-party afterwards, but none of us stayed for it. To-morrow uncle Joshua has a dinner-party: Mr. Danby is coming to meet the Broughs and Petershams: we hear that he intends to stand for the county at the next election. I am very glad of a little variety: it will be hard work to get through the three months to cousin Maria's wedding; I wish it were "over and done with," as she always cries herself when she has to leave her grammars and dictionaries to try on dresses.

June 28.—Last evening's dinner went off very pleasantly. Mrs. Brough is always nice, and Charlotte keeps everybody lively wherever she

goes. She told me she was having all her boxes made so that they could be turned into beds, couches, easy chairs, and tables. She has designed and superintended the making of them herself, and generously offers to make over the drawings to me when the carpenter has done with them; expressing her firm conviction that I, like herself, shall some day marry a penniless lieutenant. Well, better a penniless lieutenant than a Mr. Matthew Constant. That stealthy little man exasperates me. I shall quarrel with him before long, I know.

I had to sing last night, and somebody said I had a fine natural organ. Fine natural fiddlestick!

Uncle Joshua is in the most absurd good-humour with me this morning: we none of us know how to interpret his vivacity. He has even gone so far as to unlock the sacred glass-doors of his bookcase, and to give me permission to help myself. He asked at breakfast if I should like to have a pony to ride while I am at Holly Bank. Of course I should; it would scarcely be dull then. There is going to be a grand

ball at Holmby next month: I should like to go; but there's no chance of it.

June 29.—Uncle Joshua was very prompt in finding me a pony; he bought one yesterday of Mr. Petersham, after we had talked about it, and this morning I have tried it over Holmby Moor. It is a nice spirited animal: dark brown, with black mane and tail; really a pretty creature. But what has made uncle Joshua, with whom I was never a favourite, take such a generous fit, I cannot tell. Maria looks mysterious, and says he has his reasons, if they are past our finding out.

In passing through Danby village Mr. Danby overtook us; he was going to Holmby also, and we rode together. He is an amusing man when one knows him better, but awfully proud: I should say he would never forgive or forget an offence; he has the most obstinate mouth in the world; he is not handsome, indeed people call him plain; but he is not that either: I don't quite know what sort of a face it is.

June 30.—Last evening Mr. Danby came over without any invitation; we were all so surprised

while we were sitting at dessert to hear a ring at the door-bell, and in he came. An importation of foreign customs, I suppose. Uncle Joshua gave him a general invitation for the future, if he found himself dull for lack of company in his great house, and Maria gave him a long lecture on philology: it is my belief he did not understand anything she said; for he acceded to every one of her propositions, even when she contradicted herself. That odious little Mr. Matthew Constant tried all the evening to be facetious, and failed dismally; Maria tried to frown him into silence; but did not succeed; I think she is half ashamed of him sometimes in society, when he will distinguish himself by talking humorously, as he thinks. He is a gilded pill.

July 8.—Mr. Danby has availed himself very freely of uncle Joshua's general invitation to Holly Bank; he has been over six times during the last seven days. This morning he came directly after breakfast, to give me a lesson in shooting: I was very tiresome. There is an inexplicable something about his grand air and obstinate face that rouses all my natural perver-

sity into unnatural vivacity; I could not help saying very pert contradictious little things to him, for he was so miraculously patient with my blunders that it would really have been a pity not to test his temper. It is fiery, but well governed, I could tell. Once he almost vexed me, for he laughed; uncle Joshua said it was at my shrewishness. A letter from Darlston, with such capital news! My father and aunt Doe have given their consent to my going to the Holmby ball. Uncle Joshua wrote to ask them. I must go away into the hall and practise my steps, for I have half forgotten them, I think.

July 9.—Maria and I were caught yesterday dancing the new dance by Mr. Danby. He professes not to like it: I *do* like it, and I shall valse at the ball if anybody asks me; it is very graceful and pretty, I'm sure. He looked very grim when I said so, but said no more. One would absolutely think, to hear him talk, that he fancied he had got some sort of right to advise *me;* indeed, I love my own way too well to listen to such supererogatory counsel; it is all

very well for aunt Doe, and even Maria, but he is not to lecture me.

July 17.—Well, the ball is come and gone. I wish there was to be one every night for a month. I did enjoy it. I danced all night; never sat out a single set. Mr. Danby took me whenever I seemed not going to have another partner, so that I danced with him, in all, seven times; and he took me in to supper also. I heard somebody say I was pretty; I am very glad, though I don't believe I had ever thought of it before, or cared either: I am glad to be pretty, because it pleases people we like, and it *is* a good thing, though cousin Maria says it is not worth a straw whether one is pretty or not. My new white dress was handsomely made too, and it suited me; and those bouquets that came from the Danby greenhouse,—could anything be more charming? Charlotte Petersham teased me about mine, for she said she knew the azalea could only have come from Danby. I have written them a long letter home about the ball. I did not think when I came to Holly Bank that I should enjoy it half so much.

This afternoon Mr. Danby walked over to ask how we were after our late night, and uncle Joshua lent him his black horse Saladin to ride to Holmby: his own favourite has fallen lame, it seems. We had a little dispute before he left —(I wonder what makes me so perverse with him, for I don't dislike him)—and for the first time he rather lost his temper; and I saw as he went down the hill that he was fretting Saladin finely. They'll have a quarrel, too, before they get to Holmby, if he does not take care.

July 18.—Oh, we have had the saddest accident! and I can't help feeling that somehow or other it is my blame. Mr. Danby had scarcely got a quarter of a mile from the Bank when Saladin threw him, and he was taken up seemingly dead; but they brought him here, and after he had been bled he recovered consciousness. I feel so dreadfully guilty when they talk about it downstairs. Uncle Joshua says he would not have lent him the horse if he had not felt sure of both their tempers. I know how it was. I had a good cry last night thinking if he should die, —oh, if he should *die!*

July 19.—We have the quietest house, all speaking in whispers, and treading softly; the doctor is very grave about Mr. Danby's accident, and confesses he cannot tell yet what its issue may be. Another surgeon—a very clever one—was sent for from town yesterday; but he cannot be here until to-morrow night at the earliest. I was up this morning very early wandering about the garden; I can't be still in one place, and keep thinking always if—oh, but I will not encourage so terrible a fear! Everybody from far and near sends to inquire after him; there is enough for one person to do to answer them, and it falls principally to me. They all express astonishment at the manner of the accident, for Mr. Danby is such a thorough horseman. Nobody seems to suspect how it occurred.

July 25.—It has been a dreadfully anxious time, but at last Mr. Danby is recovering; the doctor says in another week he may be about again. Oh, how thankful, how deeply thankful, I am! Maria has gone to stay a week with the Petershams, and Mr. Matthew Constant has started for town; so uncle Joshua and I have to

entertain our invalid. He looks very shorn and ill, and is most particularly silent. If I did not fancy myself in some degree the cause of his suffering, I am afraid I should say he was ill-tempered. Only this morning, when I put up the green blind in Maria's sitting-room, to which he comes in the daytime, he said, quite shortly, "Child, child, be still; the blind is best down; I can't bear the light;" and when I drew it down again, he made as if the noise aggravated him, so I left him to himself for an hour or two, and then carried him as a peace-offering a little vase filled with red and white moss-roses. He accepted it with the most ungracious air in the world, and set it down on the table without even admiring them. Absolutely he is a Turk, spite of his pale face!

July 29.—This morning at breakfast Mr. Danby announced his intention of going off to the Grange in the course of the day; and he is gone. I dare say he fancies we shall miss him a very great deal more than we are likely to do, now all the bustle of preparing for Maria's wedding is begun. Papa and aunt Doe come next week, and I have

made up my mind to go back to Darlston with them. In riding to Holmby with uncle Joshua this afternoon, after Mr. Danby left, we overtook Charlotte Petersham, who must needs insinuate a hundred absurdities. What can have put it into her head that Mr. Danby and I should ever have anything to do with each other? It is absurd; I felt quite angry and mortified, and told her never to let any one hint at such a possibility before her without flatly contradicting it.

July 30.—To all our surprise, Mr. Danby arrived at luncheon-time. I think he had better come and live here altogether; for he is no sooner out of the house than back he comes again directly, and with the most frivolous excuse to-day: did we want flowers for the wedding breakfast? Such nonsense! We have plenty at Holly Bank; and if not, there are enough to be bought out of the shops at Holmby. As soon as he had asked his ridiculous question he felt how silly it was, and turned a queer, confused look. I could not help smiling and saying,—

"We shall decorate the table with corn-flowers and poppies, Mr. Danby, if all our friends' green-

houses are exhausted; or I don't think Maria would care if we had thistles and nettles instead."

"No need of the last, Margaret, where your tongue is," said uncle Joshua, laughing.

And I verily believe Mr. Danby coincided; for he regained his self-possession immediately, and began to talk very fast. Whenever Mr. Danby is put out or excited he talks fast, and so he does when he is pleased. He said he thought of going abroad for the winter. What in the world is it to us if he chooses to go to the moon!—and he speaks about it just as if he expected some of us to coax him to stay at home. I advised him to go to the Holy Land, taking Jericho in his way; and it was laughable to see the dismayed and surprised look he put on. He got up as if going to pack his carpet-bag *instanter*, and marched off. We shall not see him again, I expect, for a week, as he is going away to his brother's house at Moor Park.

August 3.—Mr. Danby found Moor Park dull, we suppose; for he is back at home again, and this morning joined uncle Joshua and me in our ride. The poor man has quite an *orphaned* look: I

could laugh sometimes at his dolour. He has not recovered thoroughly from the effects of his accident, and is so grey and solemn. We went back to the Grange with him to look at a new picture he has bought—he is sensible enough to patronize modern art; and then, as I had not seen the house, he took me through the principal rooms. There are a great number of fine paintings which he brought from abroad; but the thing he seems to set the most store by is a portrait of his mother by Reynolds. It is a lovely countenance; he seems quite to venerate her; she died just as he was growing up, he told me.

I believe he asked uncle Joshua if he might come to dinner this evening, and I taxed him with the fact; but he denied it strenuously. I proposed to my uncle that we should take him in to board and lodge, as he is so fond of Holly Bank; but was bid to hold my tongue.

My father and aunt Doe come to-morrow, and Mr. Matthew Constant the day after. Maria has got home again, and contemplates the crisis of her fate with a sublime equanimity; she wishes it were all over too, and wonders why there need be

such a fuss of bridesmaids and bridecake and *stuff!* Aunt Doe is to bring the dresses and bonnets from town; I hope they will be pretty. At first uncle Joshua determined that the wedding breakfast should be quite a family party, there are so many relatives on both sides the house; but it appears now that Mr. Danby is to be invited. What has he to do with the family, I should wish to know? I hope he will see the propriety of not coming where he would only be in the way. If I have an opportunity, I think I shall give him a hint.

August 5.—Papa and aunt Doe, and ever so many more people, are here; the house is overflowing from cellar to attic. To-morrow is the grand day. Mr. Matthew Constant grows more and more conceited; he is telling everybody he is *so* proud of Maria. Maria does not reciprocate the compliment. Oh, what a marriage! I would rather be ten times an old maid than marry such a little disagreeable man. It is a very lucky thing that Maria does not cherish romantic views of life; but I think this sort of barter and sale sinks a long way below the practical. Aunt Doe,

who has never seen him before, and hoped better things of Maria, is grieved exceedingly; and papa quite avoids him.

August 7, 1822.—The great wedding-day is over, and cousin Maria and Mr. Matthew Constant have gone into the north (it is near the 12th, and he has designs on the grouse, we believe), and everybody but myself is in bed. I have not had time yet to think whether I am glad or sorry that Mr. Danby loves me. It seems he had spoken to papa the night before; but it took me quite by surprise, and to begin to cry was, I am sure, just the silliest thing I could do. I don't know whether it is worth while to be the envy of all my acquaintance at the cost of having no delicious young time as most girls have—no balls or picnics or fun—and I shall not be seventeen till December. I am rather happy too—I shall not begin to be afraid of him. They all seem to think it an awfully serious affair. Uncle Joshua could almost thank me on his knees for achieving such honour; and though papa and aunt Doe say less, it is easy to see how proud and pleased they both are. This is the best way to fulfil my

vocation; but Charlotte Petersham's remark about the penniless ensign had filled my fancy with lofty ideas of the dignity of self-sacrifice; and I saw myself, in imagination, travelling in baggage-waggons in the rear of the regiment, and following my hero to the wars; and instead of that, I am to have a fine house and luxury all my life. I rather wish Mr. Danby were a penniless ensign for a few years, and when we were tired of dangers and adventures we could come into our fortunes and take our rest; it is not romantic to have everything smooth;—if only somebody would have contradicted us! How strange it looks to see me writing about myself and Mr. Danby as *us!* His Christian name is Harry—*Harry;* it is always a nice name to say, but *I* shall not call him by it—not now, at least. I suppose we shall see him to-morrow. Well, after all, I think I am glad—I'm sure I am.

August 10.—I have to be on my very best behaviour just now, for aunt Doe keeps the most watchful of eyes upon me whenever I begin to be *fractious* with Mr. Danby. I do wish she would not expatiate so diffusely on his virtues and his

excellence; for the fact of his being so much better than I am makes me feel inclined to be perverse and aggravating. His superlative goodness is a reproach to me. How can anybody expect nearly seventeen to be as sober as thirty? I am very glad and happy now when I am not put out of temper by too much advice. I shall like to be Mr. Danby's wife, for he is a man to look up to and trust. I could never love any one who was not my master. We had the pleasantest ride together to-day round by Haggerstone woods. I did not want to contradict *once*. I flatter myself I was as sweet as summer all the while.

August 15.—It was so vexing! I do wish people would let me have my time, instead of trying to make me a staid, experienced, well-behaved character all at once. I am most grieved with aunt Doe; she never lets me alone, and I can't bear it. If I did wish to valse, it was not so wrong; other girls valse. It is quite unreasonable to expect me to give up all my amusements, just because I am engaged to be married to Mr. Danby. If they had not both warned me, "Margaret, you must not valse, because Mr.

Danby dislikes it;" and, "Don't valse, Margaret; I can't endure to see *you* valse," I don't think I should have done it, because I knew beforehand that it was disagreeable to Mr. Danby; and I do love him enough to forego a much greater matter than a valse. But to be for ever schooled and dictated to is too bad. Why does not Mr. Danby make the best of my faults, instead of the worst? I am sure I showed him early enough how restive and wilful I can be when I am thwarted! it is his own fault if we quarrel, and not mine.

August 27.—Yesterday we all came home to Darlston. Laura and May were glad to see us—the bonnie wee darlings! Mr. Danby is coming over to stay next month with us for the shooting. It is so ridiculous to see the respect with which people treat me now to what they did. All the Wilton girls came over yesterday to talk about my engagement, and anything else I would tell them. I am rather proud to be married out of the nursery; but I would not be proud at all if Mr. Danby were not such a good man as well as a rich one. We are not to have a long engagement; I don't care; I feel as if I should be

happier with him by myself now than in the midst of people warning and watching and guiding me. I should like to be let alone. I know what would keep me quiet and tractable; my love for Harry would, if they would only leave me to it and myself; but they won't.

September 8.—We are not to have Mr. Danby at Darlston so soon as we expected; he has been obliged to go over to Nice, where his brother is staying on account of his health—there are even fears for his life. Harry writes me often long, pleasant letters, and those I send him are shamefully brief, but he says they are precious! I do wish this journey abroad had not come in the way; this autumn's parties will not be half so agreeable without him.

Cousin Maria and Mr. Constant have been staying with us a week, and we all fancied that she did not look very happy. Does he behave well to her, I wonder? He is more sleek and odious than ever; but instead of his watching her to forestall her wishes, she has to observe him; and she does it in fear and trembling. Wealthy as he is known to be, they have scarcely any establishment

—no carriage or horses; it is a very incomprehensible state of affairs; but Maria says nothing, and of course nobody cares to interfere. Yes, she said to me yesterday, that the first six months of a woman's married life are the most tiresome and miserable that can be conceived. What a confession from a four weeks' wife!

September 15.—We have heard to-day of Mr. Herbert Danby's death at Nice. Harry feels it very, very much; he will be with us by the 30th. I am very sorry for him; they were the nearest of an age in the family, and had been so much together all their lives—at school first, and then in their travels abroad. He said in his letter it had been a most painful time.

September 30.—Mr. Danby arrived this afternoon; it quite grieves me to see him so deeply feeling his loss. In his mourning he looks graver and older than ever; the little ones don't fancy him much; neither, I remember, did I at our first meeting.

October 10.—There is not much to do at Darlston just now; no company, and no going out, on Mr. Danby's account. When the ball comes, I

suppose none of us will go; aunt Doe bade me not mention it. She took me to task pretty sharply last night for some wild speech I made to Mr. Danby; she says if he were not one of the most forbearing and patient of men he would break with me at once. I can bear a good deal of lecturing from aunt Doe, because I know she loves me; still I think she might take my part a little more. I don't *mean* to do anything wrong; but these fits of mischievous perversity will get possession of me. Mr. Danby does not make a long stay with us this time; there is some talk of his going on Monday, but I don't think he will, really.

October 22.—Winter has begun very early this year. Yesterday papa, Mr. Danby, and I, were overtaken near Darlston Pits in a snow-storm; we had a terrible ride home, and sitting to play in the nursery with the little ones for an hour in my wet habit has given me a miserable cold: I feel quite stupid, and was so cross all last evening. The first part of it, till after dinner, got over pretty comfortably; but when aunt Doe fell asleep in the drawing-room, and papa was reading

his paper, Mr. Danby and I began to *fratch*, as usual. I said one thing to him that I would have bitten my tongue off to recall the moment it was uttered: but I could not humble myself enough to acknowledge I was wrong, though I saw he was deeply wounded. He got up and left me, and soon after he and papa went away into the library, and there they stayed till past midnight. I sat up longer than we do generally, in the hope he would come back and say good-night; but he did not, and this morning he was away to London before I came down-stairs. He left me in anger, I know, and I'm so sorry now; for all my perversity cannot keep me from loving him very, very dearly. There'll be a letter to-morrow.

October 27.—No letter from Mr. Danby yet: what can it mean? Aunt Doe looked at me very gravely this morning when papa took the letters out of the bag, and the tears came into her kind eyes: could they be for me? I am not well at all now: so dull and heavy, as if something were hanging over me, as if I were going to be ill. I do wish Harry would write. It is four days since he left.

October 31.—Waiting for the post! Another twenty-four anxious hours—perhaps to go through the same pang of disappointment to-morrow. No letter from Mr. Danby yet. Papa says nothing, aunt Doe says nothing; so I must just keep my anxieties to myself. This morning there was a bitter north-east wind blowing over the wolds laden with gusts of sleety rain, and there were packed clouds on the horizon which threatened snow. Old Mattie did not come with the bag; so after waiting till noon, when a fine gleam touched the sky, I thought it would be as well to take a walk, and while I was about it to go over to the post. By the time I was ready the sun was hidden again, and a few scattered snow-flakes came drifting on the wind; but there was a biting anxiety at my heart that defied the cold wet blast. I set out, hoping that the storm would pass; but it thickened when I was about half way, and then it was of no use to turn back. I was very glad to see the old church-tower and the rectory through the falling cloud at last. I went into Mattie's shop almost ashamed to be seen, and began by inquiring after her rheumatism;

and then asked suddenly, as if it were an afterthought,—

"By the by, Mattie, are there any letters for our house?" Can I be turning deceptive? Mattie was measuring out a pennyworth of nuts for a little boy; and when she had done she looked into the drawer, and, after turning over several letters, said,

"No, Miss Arden, there's not one—only the squire's paper."

So I took that and went away, as Mattie observed that it was a pity that I should have come out on such a day, and that she would send her Tom up with the letters to-morrow the minute they came in. Mattie has my secret all the while: I have been waiting for her often in the avenue lately, though the weather is so raw and chill; once even I met her at the brow of the hill leading to the village, and she looked grieved to disappoint me.

Then I set off to tramp home again. Oh, it is weary! How many days have I waited for a word of forgiveness; for an assurance of Harry's continuing love! I am tempted to think that the

prevalent winds of my life are always to be due north, as cold and as bitter as that which drove in my face as I came home.

November 1.—Oh, it is very hard to believe! I can't believe it yet,—it is too sudden,—he might have known I could not mean it when I said so. It was only my temper; and he vexed me. I did not wish him to go away. And he told papa what I had said, "That he always brought clouds with him wherever he went, and that I did not think I could ever be happy with him, and we had better separate while it was time." I did say those words, but it was only in a fit of crossness; and he took them in earnest. When the bag was brought in this morning, I said,

"Papa, is there nothing for me?" peeping over his shoulder in hopes that there might be; for I could not suspect *then* what was the truth. And papa said,—

"No, Maggie; do you expect a letter from anybody?"

I turned very red, for aunt Doe was watching me, and answered,

"Yes, papa, to be sure I do; I thought I

should hear from Mr. Danby; he has been gone a full week."

There was a dead silence for a minute that made my heart sink with an undefinable fear; then aunt Doe got up and went out, leaving papa and me alone.

"Why does he not write? do you know, papa?" I asked, hurriedly.

"You should know best, Maggie," was his answer; and he went on reading a letter that he had just opened. Then it came into my mind that what I had so foolishly and wickedly said to him the night before he went away from Darlston must have driven him from me. I caught at the table to keep myself from falling; for a thick mist rose before my eyes, and the room seemed to be going round with me.

"Speak, papa; tell me what he said to you before he left; I want to know," I whispered hoarsely.

Papa looked very much shocked:

"Why, Maggie, it was your own doing. You told him you could never be happy as his wife, and he had better leave you while there was

time; and he took you at your word. What could you expect? Mr. Danby is not a man to be led by any girl's caprice. We are all very sorry about it; but if you *felt* what you *said*, you were right to say it. I had begun to doubt myself whether you were well matched."

"Oh, papa, papa!" I cried, "I *did* like him better than anybody in the world; but I was in a passion——"

"Had you not better go to aunt Doe, my darling? the mischief is done now—Mr. Danby is gone."

So I went away upstairs to aunt Doe. She knew what it meant when I flung myself down beside her, and laid my head on her lap to cry. Oh, I was so wild and angry, as well as grieved. He has been unkind to me—I am sure he has. Nobody shall ever persuade me that he is right to leave me, when he knows as well as I do that I love him. He wants to punish me; but I feel that he is as much wrong as I am, and more.

November 2.—It is so miserable for me now; but what can I do? I must not write to Harry and tell him how sorry I am: that would be

unwomanly—aunt Doe says so. Would it? I am not sure. He loves me—he would forgive me if I asked him;—but no, no; there are so many things a girl must not say. I have tried to write a letter, but it is such a one as I dare not send. I used to be so coquettish and silly that I never would acknowledge to him that I loved him, and he might well doubt it. I cannot tell him *now*; he might fling back my confession scornfully—he would! he would! He is proud and stern and very unforgiving—perhaps he has ceased to love me. Oh, I think my heart will break!—if there were any hope—but he is gone quite away.

November 3.—Already those curious disagreeable people, the Wiltons, have observed Mr. Danby's abrupt departure; and to my other grief is added the mortification of listening to their surprised exclamations. It is very hard to have to keep up before them, but aunt Doe says I must; she will not have me give way; and my wretched cold and cough have to account for heavy eyes and aching head. Oh, for how many sore pains stands that common excuse, "a bad

headache!" I cry myself to sleep night after night; and waking suddenly in a paroxysm of tears, brood over my grief till dawn, and then get up to act indifference, that people may not say I am disappointed. I wish I could get out of sight with my trouble until I grow used to it. I feel so wretchedly ill to-night with a violent throbbing pain in my head, which I have had more or less ever since papa and I spoke together; it is as if I had got a severe blow. But the pain in my head is not half so bad as the ache that never leaves my heart. Where is Harry now? I wish I knew.

November 25.—I have not had the heart to write a line in my poor diary for weeks; and now I don't know why I have begun it again. We are all going to Italy for the winter; the doctor says if I stay here I shall die. I wish they would let me die; but I don't feel as if I should—that is too good to hope. I am very grieving and sad: I think Mr. Danby is hard; but it is of no use complaining or fretting; I brought his anger on myself. Laura and May are to be left at school; and when we come

from abroad—if I ever come—papa thinks of letting dear old Darlston, and living in London altogether. I have a fancy for the house at Norfleet, where we were all born; but he will not listen to that. Uncle Joshua writes us word that Danby Hall is shut up, and its master away, nobody knows where. I do hope we shall not meet him in our travels abroad: but it is not likely. Aunt Doe does not like leaving England, but I will not go without her—she is a darling comfort, aunt Doe.

November 27.—Everything is packed up, and to-morrow we go. It is a severance from the old life; I feel now that I would rather have stayed here; but they are doing it for me. I had a letter from cousin Maria, begging I would go to her, for she is ill; but I cannot—I cannot bear anybody's trouble but my own just now. Aunt Doe is so very kind to me, and so are they all. The 2nd of December will be my birthday: I shall be seventeen—only seventeen! Sometimes I am almost sick with my sorrow; but the fit passes, and leaves me languid and worn out. Oh, I shall always, always think that Mr. Danby

was unkind to me—I meant no harm; he is proud and unforgiving. Well, we shall never see each other again; and if we do, it will be only as strangers: and yet I cannot say sincerely that I wish I had never known him. If I live, I shall grieve down by and by; but I can never, never love any one again as I loved Mr. Danby. How foolish it is of me to write thus; but I have no one, not even aunt Doe, to whom I can speak it. Laura and sweet May travel up to London with us, and there we leave them at Mrs. Magnall's. The kind old soul will say her pet pupil is altered. She has warned me a hundred times and more about my passionate temper. How well I remember her giving me the fable of "The Oak and the Reed" to learn. I am broken enough now. I feel as if I could never be still again. The last day or two I have thought that it is possible I may not come home again any more, I am so weak and look so wan; yet I have no pain or ache anywhere now. I think he would be sorry if I *were* to die: I think he would grieve. I would grieve years hence, I know, to hear of harm having befallen him. I cannot get away

from this theme: I never thought to suffer so much. Shall we ever, ever see each other again? Oh, if I might only have told him!

PART II.

London, *February* 17, 18—.—Yesterday week, two old boxes were sent up from Darlston containing some of papa's books and papers; and amongst them, behold my lost diary! the lock all rusted, and the binding mouldy. Faithful old secret-keeper! I have been reading a few of its last dismal pages. Can it be Margaret Arden who wrote them? Well, I suppose it was.

Wonderful to look back ten years, and to see the difference between then and now. Laura married and a mother, pretty May grown up, and myself quite on the old maids' list. Papa,—I don't know what ails papa; he always looks preoccupied and melancholy. Some of his wonderful speculations may be going wrong; but we dare not ask, for he avoids all allusion to them studiously.

We have had uncle Joshua staying in town for a fortnight: he brings all the gossip of his neighbourhood. Mr. Danby seems vowed to bachelorhood. He has become a very busy popular man in his county. He must be growing middle-aged now: I am seven-and-twenty, and he was ten years older or more. Papa was speaking yesterday of some very important measure that he is trying to carry through parliament, and saying that he had made a very able speech in the House upon it, and was much trusted by his party. I read that speech in the paper—at least, I dare say it is that one; but he speaks often. It strikes me that he clings with intense pertinacity to his purposes;—that old obstinate look,—I wonder whether his grey face wears it still? If there were a chance, I would go to hear him some night, for old friendship's sake.

February 25.—Last night Maria Constant and I got into the Ladies' Cage at the House, and I heard Mr. Danby speak. He is not very fluent, but he brings out a few nervous, detached sentences that are very much to the

point; and when he has said his say, down he sits. He reminds me of nothing so much as a hammer driving in a nail with a few steady strokes. I was surprised to observe how grey his hair has become, and what a worn, overworked look there is on his face. They say he is a thorough-going, practical, energetic man of business.

February 28.—We are all very uneasy about my father just now: I never saw him in such a restless, perturbed state before. I wonder what could make him rush into speculation: we had money enough and to spare, without gambling for more.

March 17.—At a dinner-party at the Petershams' last night we met Mr. Danby. Papa had some talk with him, and he took notice of May, remarking that she is like what I was. She is much prettier than ever I was, even in my best days. We exchanged half-a-dozen sentences about indifferent matters, and both looked and felt awkward with each other. I could not help remembering that speech I made to him so long ago, which broke off our engagement. Charlotte's

"penniless lieutenant" has met with quick promotion.

March 30.—I am miserable about my father; he looks ill and anxious to the last degree. If he would only speak, and tell us what he fears or suffers, it would be better than this silent expectation of we know not what.

April 2.—My father looks calmer this morning than we have seen him do for months; he feels, at least, that all is known—the very worst. Uncle Joshua says he has expected it for years, and that no man who ran after every new theory that was started, and took a part in every specious project that turned up, could reasonably look for any other result. Uncle Joshua is very hard and unconciliatory. He does not seem at all distressed at the verification of his sagacious previsions—rather the reverse, indeed. When my father stated the case in his hesitating way, he blustered out after his usual manner: "Pretty interest your philanthropy is likely to bring you, brother James!—a fool and his money are soon parted." My poor father looked miserable, especially when he had to confess that Darlston must be sold.

Uncle Joshua cast up his hands, and cried, "James, you're surely mad to talk of selling Darlston: things can't be so bad as that?"

"They are as bad as bad can be. We must make our home at Norfleet henceforward," my father answered. At this announcement uncle Joshua looked as if he were struck dumb, shook his head, and walked out of the house. As soon as he was gone, May began to cry and to hang about my father in her fond, affectionate way; it was very distressing; she begged that they might not be separated whatever should happen. It is a comfort in our adversity to feel that there is no disunion amongst us. Aunt Dorothy got her coaxed away, and then my father and I had a long talk about ways and means. It was very late before we got to bed, and then I could not sleep for thinking of all the changes that were to come. We go to Norfleet in a few days.

April 17.—This is going to be no playing at poverty. Oh, surely if my poor father had known what disastrous consequences to all of us his foolish speculations were to produce, he would not have been so rash! We left him in London

yesterday, and arrived here this afternoon about dusk. If ever there was a house that had "haunted" legibly inscribed on the face of it, surely Norfleet Manor-house is the place. Dowker has come with us, and has done nothing but grumble since she set her foot over the doorstone. Matters look unpromising enough certainly. It is a wet night to begin with, and the parlour-fire smoked, so we have been obliged to let it go out; the paper on the walls is not only damp, but it hangs in ragged festoons; there is no carpet, and very little furniture. We have all done our best to be cheerful, but it was a miserable effort; and now poor little May is fretting herself to sleep.

April 18.—A better day than could have been expected. There is a charm and an invigorating power in spring sunshine: this morning rose very bright and clear, and I found myself hopeful and cheerful. We have all been hard at work as carpenters, upholsterers, and housemaids, and have done what we could to reduce this old place to order. How very fortunate my father did not come down with us! aunt Doe is a whole host

of servants and workpeople in herself; for she is one of those clever women who can turn their hand to anything as readily as if they had been born to it. By her advice we have forsaken the large parlours for two little wainscoted rooms with bow-windows that look into the garden. We have to make the chintz-covers and curtains ourselves, under Dowker's querulous superintendence. She never looked to see her young ladies work, she reiterates; and all our misfortunes she resents as private, personal afflictions. Faithful old soul!

April 27.—My father came down from London yesterday, looking, to our sorrow, very ill and worn. He gives way to his depression more than we anticipated; and now that all necessity for exertion is over, he is sinking into a state of dull apathy from which nothing seems able to rouse him. He sits the whole of the long mornings in his dressing-room, not reading or writing, or doing anything that we can discover but ponder over and lament what is now irretrievable. What a fortunate thing it is we have been able to make some of the house cheerful! if he had seen it as we saw it at first, I do not think he would have stayed.

We are all rather proud of the results of our exertions in the upholstering trade; for in our great Darlston house we had no rooms so comfortable as our two old-fashioned parlours, when the sun shines. The furniture, re-covered with red and white chintz, is quite seemly; and we have discovered a quantity of grotesque china ornaments in one of the cupboards, which fit out the mantel-pieces and cabinets very appropriately. It is ugly, May says; but it is in keeping with the stiff-backed chairs and spindle-legged tables. By dint of glorious fires, bunches of lilac and laburnum in the vases, and our books and other feminine belongings scattered about, we have succeeded in making a very picturesque and cosy home for ourselves. If only my dear father would be more cheerful.

May 9.—We are grieving down now, and gradually fitting ourselves to the new life. We have all found out that we have a till now undeveloped taste for gardening; and for the last ten days we have been at work in our mossy wilderness. After all, it is a very pretty spot: the view of the house from the farther side of the

river is most picturesque: but papa fancies the ivy makes it damp. I hope he will not insist upon having it all torn down before Laura and her husband come, for then it will look naked and dreary. Aunt Doe has been busy yesterday and to-day with Dowker getting ready rooms for them, and a nursery for the youngster. I am glad they are coming, if it is only to stir my father out of his languid apathy, which he suffers to grow upon him more and more every day.

May 15.—The house is turned completely upside down since Laura, Norton, and the baby arrived; but the fuss has done my father good already: he is beginning to look more like himself again, which is a great comfort. But to think that I, Mistress Margaret Arden, am to be reduced to a mere cipher in the house by a squalling chit of eight months old! It is preposterous, incredible, yet painfully true. This shows me the additional consequence a woman gains by fulfilling her vocation in the old-fashioned way. Laura, ten years younger than I am, a married mother, treats me with the civilest patronage in the world. First I must give up my bedroom to be converted into a

nursery, because it has a southern aspect, which will be suitable for baby; then I must be awakened every morning at five o'clock,—I who never get up till the day is well aired,—by its crowing next door to me. No longer ago than yesterday, I caught it gnawing the cover of my precious *Rochefoucauld's Maxims;* Laura said it was its gums or its teeth. Teeth, indeed! Well, I hope the little mischief has imbibed some of their bitterness. What is the good of being an old maid, I should like to know, if I am to be deprived of my privileges in this way? As well be married and have done with it: at least one knows what to expect. Laura, whose whole soul is in a bassinet, is quite lady paramount now, and wears her baby as if it were an insignia of the order of merit, conferred upon her by nature in approbation of some wonderful feat that she has performed. Then she bores me to extinction by lengthy details concerning it. Why, I could cite as many and more entertaining of my kitten Toby! Its bonnets, its frocks, its little pink toes, its great eyes with a wise sagacious look, its rosebud of a mouth, its dimple, its six yellow hairs,—oh, how she does

ring the changes on them, as if every baby in Christendom had not the like! I verily believe if you were to collect twelve infants of eight months old and put them together into a room, unclothed, I could not pick out Dottie. *Dottie!* that is the pet name for the innocent; she was christened Mabel, but Laura never speaks English now; she talks exclusively in babble. It is scarcely an hour since she invited me at dinner to partake of "mincey beefey:" I could not have touched that dish if I had been paid to do it. If it were——

May 16.—Yesterday I was interrupted in the midst of a sentence by a knock at my door. Nurse in tears—baby in a fit. Would I go over to Holmby for the doctor; there was nobody else to go? Of course I would; there is so much trouble in bringing the quaint little mortals into the world, that it is a pity they should go out of it prematurely. It was an even down-pour o rain, so I saddled papa's little rough pony myself,—the groom at the inn who does it generally being away,—and had a hard seven miles' trot over the wold. Ah, well, who knows but that

Dottie may grow up to be a comfort to me when I am an old woman! Laura says she has a sweet temper; and so she ought to have, poor wee soul, for they try it with castor-oil, bottle, and pins from morning till night. I dare say it was similar persecution in my infancy that made me so restive when I grew up. Aunt Doe says no; it was the natural perversity that is in me: but I incline to think myself that it was injudicious codling. As I was trotting post-haste down Holmby Lane, I encountered Mr. Danby on his pretty bay mare; coming to Norfleet has brought us quite into his neighbourhood. I suppose if we went anywhere we should be likely to meet him; but we are too poor to keep company. Perhaps Charlotte Bruce will take May to the Holmby ball, if Laura and Norton don't go: she would like it, I am sure. I remember my Holmby ball: what an enjoyable time it was! Heigho, *ten* years ago!

June 5.—Somebody has found his way to Norfleet, to whom I should be very glad to say good-bye,—Captain Ernest Norton. He came for the Holmby archery meeting and ball, and of course May saw him at both. He is my favourite

aversion—a male coquette. He boasts of having flirted his way all round the alphabet, and keeps a small collection of locks of hair, gloves, ribbons, and flowers—feminine trophies, duly labelled, and always open to the inspection of his friends. He is doing his utmost to turn May's head; for her beauty makes it well worth his while to enslave her; and she takes his homage in earnest, and is evidently pleased. Laura laughed when I spoke to her about it, and said it was only "Ernest's way." She believed he was engaged. "*Ernest's way!*" I shall warn May, let her be angry or no.

June 7.—Papa, perfectly unconscious of what is going forward, presses Captain Norton to stay another week; and May is quite delighted. It vexes me inexpressibly to see her throwing away her heart on such a trifler. Only yesterday I caught her in tears, because there was some talk of his going away: I ventured on my warning, and she fired up indignantly, and then flashed out of the room without answering me a single word. And all the evening she kept aloof from me, and was more winning than ever to Captain Norton,

as if to defy my doubts. It is a pity she saw so much of him last Christmas at Laura's house: the mischief was done then. Charlotte Bruce has asked me to go to her for a couple of days next week; they are going to have some pleasant company, she says.

June 12.—This morning Captain Norton left Norfleet, greatly to my satisfaction and aunt Doe's too: he has been here a great deal too long. Laura's husband spoke to him about his conduct to May, and during the last three days it underwent a total change. He began to treat her like a child, and to jest at her; he even had the impertinence to say, "Good-bye, little May, you'll be quite a woman when I come again," and to offer to kiss her; but she drew herself up proudly, and gave him a stately curtsey instead. Bless her dear heart! But I did wish I were a man just for one short quarter of an hour, that I might have administered a sound castigation, and have changed his wily, conceited smile into a more dolorous expression.

June 17.—Charlotte Bruce's pleasant company was Mr. Danby and his eldest brother. The

house is a good one for visitors: no tiresome constraint. Each one does what is agreeable in his and her own eyes. Mr. Danby and I talked political economy, foreign travel, and pictures. He has got a very nervous habit of twirling his watch-guard, which I don't remember in old times; and whenever any, the most distant allusion to them occurs, even in general conversation, he flushes and starts away. I should like to know what he thinks then. I am as composed as possible; therefore I opine all the ancient feelings are dead.

We had a long letter from Laura this morning to tell us of their safe arrival at home. She adds, as agreeable news, that her brother-in-law, Captain Ernest, is going to be married in August to a Mrs. Foxley, a rich widow, who is twelve years older than himself. May heard the news read aloud by papa without betraying the slightest emotion or surprise. She has not once mentioned his name since he left the house: a sure indication that he is ever in her thoughts. How soon we women learn to be hypocrites!

June 24.—We have got a very dangerous type

of low fever stirring in the neighbourhood just now. A man at Danby-Fleetwood, and two of his children, have got it; and two children in Norfleet have died of it. May and I were at the school to-day, and heard that Mary Wallis had taken it,—she was our nurse, an excellent creature, —and May insisted on going to see her, so we both went. She is very ill, not likely to recover. Uncle Joshua has sent me an invitation for a month; but it is not at a season like the present that I can leave home, so I have declined. Mr. Danby was here yesterday to see my father.

June 27.—We are in dreadful anxiety for darling May; we cannot tell what ails her—surely it cannot be the fever! She hangs about languid and weary, sometimes hysterically gay, and sometimes very still. Dr. Manning shall see her, if she is no better to-morrow. Aunt Doe is in great alarm, but dares not say a word on my father's account. He has got some idea into his head about her and Captain Ernest Norton; and we are afraid of his speaking to her about him just now. She is better let alone.

July 1.—Poor May is delirious in fever: she

was struck with it three days ago, and its progress is awfully rapid. Oh, it makes our hearts bleed to see her! She has not recognized any of us for eight-and-forty hours; but we have hope in her strong constitution; Dr. Manning says we *may* hope. It was kind in Mr. Danby to walk over this morning, but I told him he must come no more to our infected house.

July 5.—The crisis is passed now, and our sweet pet lies passive and helpless, but living and perfectly conscious. Oh, what hope it gives to see beloved eyes light up with intelligence when the dark fever-eclipse is over! Our only fear now is from exhaustion. What a different world the child will look on when she rises from her sick bed! Laura would come over when she heard of her illness, and is here now. May seems to like her near her better than any of us. Aunt Doe is worn out with watching.

July 12.—This morning we buried our darling, our beautiful May! Long will it be ere we can realize our loss; her death came so suddenly, so painfully, just when we were beginning to hope that she might be spared to us. When she saw

aunt Doe in tears, she said, "Don't cry, I am quite happy." Afterwards she added, "Let Dottie have my watch when she is old enough; Maggie, you take my books." They were what she had prized most.

My heart swelled almost to bursting as I knelt beside her, and asked her to forget it if I had ever been unkind or harsh to her; she could not speak then, but she smiled her forgiveness. Last night, when I went to look at her in her coffin, the smile was on her lips still. Papa is quite struck down by this sudden bereavement: "Always the best first," he keeps murmuring to himself. It seems as if all the sunshine had faded out of the house, and left us in the midst of barren winter.

July 28.—We have prevailed on my father to go home with Laura; the change will divert and cheer him more than anything else could. Oh, in what haste are we to put our dead out of our thoughts, and to get away back into the beaten routine of our lives! Strange contradiction! what we most love we seem desirous the soonest to forget. The fever has made empty places at

many hearths besides ours. Last Sunday at church there were many, many people in mourning. Aunt Doe feels May's loss so keenly.

July 31.—I have just come back from a walk all through the blazing afternoon sun to Danby-Fleetwood. We got word this morning that Mr. Danby had taken the fever: I could not believe it at first; but it is true, *it is true.* I dare not face aunt Doe. All the old love poured back over my heart like a stream with a fresh on it when I heard it, and this new fear for him makes me seem half forgetful of dear May. How selfish we are even in our affection! My thoughts are more, far more for Mr. Danby than for my dead sister. Will he live, or will he die? I ask myself twenty times an hour. What is it to me? Oh, my God, it is all the world to me! I feel as if I could not bear to lose him, as if he were mine again. I think if one came to me now and said, "He is dead!" I should drop dead at their feet also.

I took the bridle-road through Haggerston Woods, and asked at the first lodge if what we had heard was true—that Mr. Danby had taken

the fever; and the woman said, indeed that was over-true, the doctor was at the house then. I rode half-way up the avenue, and turned back again. What more could I learn than I had learnt? What right had I there? I asked the gatekeeper who there was to nurse her master, and she told me "nobody but the servants;" and some of them were in such a fright they were quite helpless. How desolate it sounds! Could not I go to him? Oh, that I had the right!

How vividly all the past comes over me again—all its bitter pain and mortification! Ah, I was a child then; but I have never had young thoughts since; never has another love or another hope come into my heart since that first golden glorious day when Mr. Danby asked me to be his wife! Foolish,—here am I alone,—there lies he alone, suffering, perhaps dying! and between us ten long years of estrangement. Can the end be coming? Oh, my God, have mercy, have pity! I scarcely know how or what I write; all about me seems whirl and confusion. Yet how still, how sleepy calm, is the summer day! *it* takes no note of sorrow. When I grieve, I would have

the clouds hang low and weep. How can I think of the day, when he is in agony? Why cannot I go to him? Nobody but servants to tend him —no hand of affection. Ought I not to go? What care I for that old scarecrow, "What will people say?" Would not my heart reproach me if he died alone? I know it would.

August 1.—O May, May! my angel sister, can the time be coming when I shall wish myself lying beside thee in the grave? Very sad, very desolate, very hopeless looks the blank world. Last night I could not rest. There was a glorious moon, the country was hushed and lovely. I never met a soul as I went down by Haggerston Woods to Danby—to the house. All the windows were dark, and I was never seen; but it eased me somewhat to be near him. If I might only have gone in—but no. And I came home again weeping—oh, how bitterly! Aunt Doe had found out my absence, and was grieved. It is not easy to judge for others: she does not know how I suffer. This morning the report is that he is worse, and that a hospital-nurse from Holmby is left with him. Are those women kind? He

has no need of me now: oh, I wish he had! I have written to my father to tell him: he will be grieved anew, for he always liked Mr. Danby.

August 3.—How long are those glorious days burdened with fear! I sit in the garden for hours alone; mind vacant except for one terrible dread: there is nothing for me to do to break this intensity of waiting anxiety. We were told this morning that there was very, very little hope. God help us!

August 4.—Last night I fell asleep, and dreamed the most beautiful dream! We were young again, and no quarrel had come to divide us; it was the old happy time at Holly Bank. We were walking, in my dream, in that lovely glade of Haggerston Woods where the lilies grow; (how poor May liked to gather those lilies!) and it seemed as if we went on and on for years; I always felt young in my heart. But looking up suddenly, I saw his face was grown old, and all his hair was white; and I awoke. Such a strange dream! We have just heard news: to-day's report is many degrees more favourable. I met

Dr. Manning coming out of the gate at Danby, and he told me his friends might be easy about him now. Oh, how thankful I am! Directly I got home I fell on my knees and thanked God. His loss would have afflicted many, many besides me: he is so truly excellent.

August 6.—Yesterday Mr. Danby had a relapse: I could no longer restrain myself, and I went to him. I was suffered to go upstairs by the nurse, under a promise of secrecy. He did not know me. "O God! have mercy, and spare him!" is all my cry; but it seems now as if the heavens were brass to my prayers. And I had begun to hope so certainly.

August 8.—Again a glimmer of hope! "Only a constitution of iron could have gone through such a severe struggle," Dr. Manning says; and he adds, that there is something mysterious in this sudden improvement, for which he had not ventured to look. It seems as if he had made up his mind to live, and *would* live, spite of the fever.

August 10.—Mr. Danby gradually rallies: "all danger is past." Oh, my heart could scarcely

bear the torrent of joy those last few words poured over it. He will live, and I shall see him again. There was a faithful prophecy in my dream after all.

We had a letter from Laura this morning: she tells us that my poor father never ceases to lament for May, dear May! She cannot prevail on him to remain with them any longer. He says nothing but "Home, home." We look for his return to Norfleet to-morrow or the next day. Now I can meet him with a less mournful face.

August 28.—Mr. Danby is out of doors again. My father and I went to inquire after him this morning, and found him crawling up and down on the sunny side of the house. He said very few people went near him: he thought they were afraid; and he was very dull often. There was a great deal of his old kindness of manner to-day, without that confused stiffness which I used to remark; and he went back to calling me "Margaret," just in the old way. I declare it would have seemed quite natural, if he had begun to lecture me, and I to contradict him. What an

adhesive nature must mine be! To this old faithful friend I may whisper that I would have been glad if he had lectured me for something, if only that I might have shown him how wonderfully tractable and docile time has made me. But no, he was as pliable as he used to be obstinate: his illness appears to have tamed him too. How grey he looked, to be sure! and not over handsome in his velvet-cap.

August 30.—What a compound of oddities is Mr. Danby! This morning there came a note from him to aunt Doe to say that he had taken it into his head that a change of air would do him good, and he fancies that of Norfleet would suit him: can she take him in for a few days? Aunt Doe looked across to my father, who said, quite carelessly,—

"To be sure; let the poor fellow come: but he will find it a sad house now."

Everything recalls May to his memory. Sweet May!

September 4.—We have had Mr. Danby on our hands for three days now; he behaves remarkably well, and seems absolutely no longer to care

to have a will of his own; I have not the chance of contradicting him, if I felt ever so much disposed. His being here is good for my father, too; they get on the inexhaustible theme of their foreign travels, and talk for everlasting. Aunt Doe wonders how long he will stay; for we want to invite poor Maria Constant, and she will not care to be seen by anybody but ourselves. Who would have thought that Mr. Matthew Constant, that little, soft-spoken, sleek abomination, could ever have treated her so shamefully! Even uncle Joshua, whose creed is, "Tyranny unlimited for man, and obedience without bounds for woman," considers that a separation is absolutely necessary. How fortunate it is that there are no children to suffer through their quarrels!

September 8.—How surprised everybody will be! Aunt Doe says "No;" but I say "Yes." Well, I am happy. Oh, I must live to atone!

This was how it came about.

Papa had, for the first time this season, taken his gun and gone out for an afternoon's shooting, and aunt Doe was busy with Dowker upstairs getting ready Maria Constant's rooms, so I had

Mr. Danby to entertain all to myself. We have never been left alone before since he came to Norfleet, and I did feel it rather embarrassing: I never was so shy of him before. Neither of us attempted to talk at first. We had got the windows into the garden open, it was so hot and sunny; and he remarked that this was one of the prettiest old-fashioned nooks he had ever been in; he liked it almost better than Danby. I laughed at his modest tastes, and said I thought he would not like to make the exchange.

"Yes, Margaret, I would truly, if I might have Norfleet just as it stands, with all its belongings!" he replied, hurriedly. "Margaret, I have come into possession of a piece of your property in rather a curious way. Do you recognize this old seal?"

I took it out of his hand, and asked,—

"Where did you find it? I did not know it was lost; I wore it to my chain."

"Guess where I found it, Margaret?"

"I don't like your enigmas; I cannot guess. On the staircase?"

"No; did not I give you that little seal long

ago, and did you not laugh at the device? I'll tell you, Margaret, where I found it, shall I?"

"Just as you please," said I; and I coloured violently—began to suspect.

"If I had not found it when I did, and made nurse Goodhugh confess, I believe Dr. Manning might have prescribed for me in vain. Margaret, let the past be forgiven."

Whether I was to forgive *him*, or whether he was to forgive *me*, did not clearly appear. I was standing up by the window, and he had taken hold of my hand, grasping it so hardly, that my rings cut into the flesh; I could not speak for a second or two; then I said,—

"I did not mean what I said that night; you were too hasty."

"Yes, Margaret; and bitterly have I had cause to regret it. You were wrong once; but I was a hundred times wrong." (There was an admission!) "Can you, will you, pardon me? Margaret, if you deny me, you will kill me!"

He was far too submissive to need contradiction.

"And will you *bear* with me? I am no more

an angel now than I was ten years ago," I replied.

"I never said you were an angel, Margaret; I am far too imperfect myself to mate with any but a faulty woman. I will not be so exacting."

I really hope he won't; for if he were, it is certain that I could never satisfy him. And so we had a long, pleasant talk—very different to those old *fratching* bouts, which did not lack a pungent aroma of pleasure, too—and settled it between our two selves; so that when aunt Doe came in, she found us in the midst of an amicable dispute. I could have laughed at her countenance of surprise and dismay, for she understood it all in a moment. When we told her, she said gently,—

"I am glad to hear it, children." (*Children!* forty and twenty-seven!) "I have no doubt you will be far happier than if you had married ten years since. Maggie was too wilful; she is broken in now."

Mr. Danby looked grave. I hope everybody is not going to take his part this time, and draw comparisons to my disadvantage. Certainly it is

not necessary. I am quite as good as he is now. My father is very much satisfied; he is more like himself than he has been since May died. Darling May! how happy she would have been to see this time! I well remember her saying, when we met in town last spring,—

"I verily believe, Maggie, you two will marry in the end; for you have never loved anybody else, and I don't think he has." And I would not listen to her.

September 15.—All goes on easily and quietly with us. Mr. Danby is still here; and Maria Constant has come—so worn and broken down, poor thing, that I don't think she could, if she tried, define any word but "misery." She says, what is true enough, that she and Matthew never had a chance of happiness; for they began their married life without a spark of love. Harry and I love each other very dearly, I think—I am *sure* we do; but still there may be to bear and forbear between us. How hard it must be for two indifferent people to live in peace! Dr. Manning wants Mr. Danby to go to Madeira for the winter; but he objects, and thinks he will do very well

at home. I would have him go, but neither will he listen to me on this point: he likes his own way the best, after all.

December 25.—My diary has been forgotten for weeks; it is surprising how few things a perfectly happy time gives us occasion to chronicle. Laura and her husband and uncle Joshua are over here for Christmas and our marriage. I have been spending my last evening alone in my room. If May had been alive, she would have borne me company. But none of the others know me as she did; so I, and the fire, and the shadows of ever so many past years, have had the time to ourselves. Harry is at Danby: he left soon after dinner, and the others are talking in the parlour about to-morrow, perhaps. I am glad papa takes my going so quietly. There is one thing, I shall not be very far away.

The wind goes roaring and skirling round the old house to-night as if it meant to bring it all down about our ears. There are chillier and bitterer things in this world of ours than the wildest wind that ever blew; but my life, I trust, has done with them. I shall talk less to my faithful

friend, the fire, than for many years I have done; but let me not forget its companionship either. Oh, faithful fire! I cannot remember that you ever put on a scowling face, or looked cold, or went out in any gone time of calamity; you have always been the same: pleasanter, perhaps, in life's dark hours by the mere force of contrast. And I love you, my friend; many a grief, now to be recollected no more, have *you* seen that was hidden from all besides. Oh, many a grief! and not a few joys either; and the greatest of all joys is this I show you now—my happy love. May I make Harry happy too! I shall—I will; God's blessing on us both!

High piled upon the hearth are the Yule logs; and as I strike them gently, out rush myriads of sparks: some fly up the chimney—hopes of the new life that is coming; some fall back upon the stone and become white dust: these last typify my old ambitions, visions, and wearinesses, which are of less value now than a handful of wood-ashes. Aunt Doe is at the door to wish me good-night. There is a grey thread in the brightest web: to-day at church we saw

poor little May's monument, which has only just been put up. Papa covered his face when his eyes fell on it. It will look down on us to-morrow. Oh, if I could have had her beside me, I think my happiness would have been perfect! No, no,—there would have been some other flaw; nothing is perfect in our earthly life.

December 26.—The sun arose almost as bright as May this morning; but there is a keen hard frost. Never mind; let the sun shine all the way to church, and I don't care for the cold. My heart feels very still this day; I have no fears and no doubts. Why should I? I shall not weep, for I am happy and I am glad—I have shed my last tears for Harry now. My father is calling to me to make haste, for they are all waiting, and aunt Doe impatiently bids me lay down my pen. Good-by, old friend, Margaret Arden will tell thee no more secrets!

From the Diary.

WONDERS will never cease! Stephen, my brother, is in England, is *here.* It seems almost incredible, but it is *true.* I left him when the clock struck twelve to come to bed, but I am so excited by the surprise that sleep I cannot. He came upon us like a ghost, for unexpectedness I mean—in person he is substantial and handsome as ever, cheerful too and flourishing.

We were sitting together on the sands, Belle and I, Emmy and Miss Mostyn being gone over to the Hillgrove woods on a sketching expedition, when we saw a stranger going about from group to group as if searching for some one. I said to Belle,—

"Belle, that person reminds me of your

uncle Stephen," and while the words were on my lips, he turned our way and came quickly towards us. Then I knew him. He knew me in a moment, and greeted me just in the old manner as if we had but been parted a week and were meeting again in the commonest course of events.

"Well, Kathie," was his cry, "how do you do, old lady? I've been to Wortlebank, and as I did not find you there, I followed you down here."

I could not speak for a minute or two, but soon the quick beat of my heart went down, and sitting side by side under the cliffs, we told each other what changes had happened to each since we last spoke face to face.

The world has gone well with him since he betook himself to a new country, and so far as he is concerned he has no wish to return permanently to England. The ways and customs of the colony suit him better, but he admits that last autumn—spring, I suppose, in Australia—such a fit of yearning and home sickness seized upon him that he thought he should have *died*

had he not come over; I can understand that feeling well.

He tells me Flora is stout and strong now, and a very active woman in society; it is the fashion for women to be active there; and that Minnie was married just before he left to a young surgeon, the son of some people who went out in the same ship with them. His Steenie is a great sheep farmer.

He proposes to remain only a month.

Poor Stephen, he told me, that in passing through Eversley, he had to wait an hour, so he walked off to the minster, longing to have a pull at the bells, but the vergers were a new generation who remembered him not, and said "nay" as if they thought he were jesting. It consoled him a little to be reminded that the present bells were not the bells he used to ring, but new ones that were put up after the fire. He had called on Canon Withers and had left him some curiosities from abroad—he has brought many things for my children too. I hear him walking over head, or I should think to-day all a dream.

Felix came down to-day to help me entertain Stephen, and on Monday Harry is to come and bring his wife; Mr. Dover will stay a couple of days with us some time this week.

Our quiet sea-side visit is likely to be turned into one of excitement for everybody, for Dr. Fergus arrived and departed in the course of yesterday, and Miss Mostyn has been in the clouds almost ever since.

I wish Stephen could have stayed over Emmy's marriage, but that he cannot do. I let him go up the steps to the cliff to see Isabel's grave by himself this morning—I will not renew that painful recollection any more.

Steenie writes to us from Westminster, that he trusts we are going to "keep some sea for him;" but Felix thinks, as Stephen is with us, we must curtail our visit to Kirklands, and when he leaves us take a run down to Crofton, or some nearer place, for the rest of our boy's holidays.

This arrangement is the best; Stephen must carry away with him a remembrance of us all at home at Wortlebank, for I scarcely think he will ever come to England again when he leaves us this time.

Mr. Dover, Emmy, and Miss Mostyn are gone botanizing to the Hillgrove woods, and to-morrow we all return together to Wortlebank.

Stephen continually reminds me of his former character when we are talking by our two selves, and I could not help saying to him once that I thought his colonial prosperity had come as much by good luck as good management; at which he laughed, flung back his head exactly as he used to do, and then agreed with me.

Belle is busy with some gift to send to her cousin Minnie, I find; and with that and Miss Mostyn's cushion, she fills all her in-doors leisure. Stephen and Felix went out this afternoon in a boat, and as we were left by ourselves, she prevailed on me to read her a sketch from the

Portfolio. I took the first that came to hand, which happened to be the story of a poor pensioner formerly hanging about one of the Eversley inns.

THE POOR PENSIONER.

I MET her in the corridor, walking to and fro, and muttering to herself with a down-looking aspect, and a severe economy of dress, the season considered. I wondered how she came there, and was, to say the least of it, decidedly startled when she stopped directly opposite me, and, lifting a pair of blank, brown eyes to my face, said, in a stern voice:—

"He was not guilty, my lord judge. God will right him yet. It will all come out some day. I can wait: yes, I can wait. I am more patient than death: I am more patient than injustice."

I made a hasty and undignified retreat downstairs when she left the passage free, and, meeting the waiter, inquired who the woman was. The man touched his forehead significantly, and said

that she was harmless (I was very glad to hear it); and that she lived on the broken victuals; and that his mistress always gave her a dinner on Christmas day. While we were speaking together, she descended to where we stood, and repeated the exact formula of which she had made use before. She was a tall woman, strong-limbed, and thin to meagreness. She might be fifty, or perhaps fifty-five; her skin was withered, and tanned by exposure to all sorts of weather, and her uncovered hair was burnt to a rusty iron-grey. The waiter suggested to her to go to the kitchen fire; at which she broke into a scornful laugh, and reiterated, "I am more patient than death. I am more patient than injustice," and then walked out at the open door into the snow.

"I don't think she feels it, sir," said the waiter, opening my door for me to enter.

I do not think she did. I watched her from my window. She took up a handful of the newly-fallen snow and thrust it into her bosom, then hugged it close, as if it were a living thing, that could be warmed by that eager clasp; I saw also, as she turned her dark face up towards the sky,

that the angry scowl left it. I should imagine that all sensation in her was dead, except in one corner of her heart, to which had gathered the memory of some miserable wrong, whose acuteness would bide with her to the day of her death.

Her name, as I learnt on further inquiry, was Hester. She had been born and bred in the Yorkshire dales; her parents were of the yeoman class, and poor through improvidence rather than misfortune. As a girl, Hester was remarkable for her pride and her beauty, of which no more relics remained than are left of the summer rose-garden in drear and misty November. She received the scant education common to her condition half a century ago, and grew up a wild, wilful-tempered girl, impatient of all restraint, and eager for change and excitement. At sixteen she married, and very shortly afterwards her husband found it expedient to leave the dales, and to enlist in a regiment which was ordered on foreign service. Hester followed him to India, and led the life of camps for several years. During this interval her family lost sight of her completely;

for, having parted in anger, no correspondence was kept up between them. This silence and separation lasted full nine years, during which time Death dealt hardly with those left at home. Of all the large family of sons and daughters whom the old people had seen grow up to man's and woman's estate, not one survived. Their hearts began to soften towards the offending child, and they made efforts to learn if the regiment to which her husband belonged had returned to England. It had not.

One bleak and wintry night, while the solitary and bereaved couple were sitting by their silent hearth—it was a very lonely and retired spot where the house stood—a heavy step came up the little garden path. Neither of them stirred. They thought it was one of the farm-servants returning from the village, whither he had been sent on some errand. The curtains had not been closed over the window, and all the room, filled with the shine of a yule-tide fire, was visible to the wayfarer without. The mother sat facing the window; lifting her slow, dull gaze from the white wood-ashes on the hearth, she looked across

towards it, and uttered a low, frightened cry. She saw a dark face peering in at the glass, which wore the traits of her daughter Hester. She thought it was her wraith, and said so to the old man, who, taking a lantern, went out to see if anybody was lurking about. It was a very boisterous night, loud with wind, and black with clouds of sleety rain. At the threshold he stumbled over a dark form, which had crouched there for the slight shelter afforded by the porch. He lowered the lantern, and threw the light on the face of a woman.

"Dame! dame! It is our bairn: it is lile Hester!"

The mother appeared, and, with a great, gasping cry, recognized her daughter.

They led her into the house, towards the glowing heat of the fire, and set her down by the hearth; for her limbs would scarcely support her. Hester wore a thin and ragged cloak, beneath the folds of which she had hidden her child from the storm. He had fallen asleep in her bosom; but as her mother removed the dripping garment from her shoulders, he woke up with a laugh of child-

ish surprise and pleasure. He was a fine, well-grown boy, of from six to seven years old, and showed none of those signs of want and suffering which had graven premature age upon the wasted features and gaunt frame of his mother. It was some time before Hester recovered from her frozen exhaustion, and then her first and eager demand was for food for the child.

"O Heaven, pity me!" cried the old woman, who was weeping over the pair. "Hester and her lad starving, while there was to spare at home!"

She supplied their wants soon, and would have taken the boy; but Hester held him to her with a close and jealous grasp, chafing his limbs, warming his little hands in her bosom, and covering his head with passionate kisses.

He fell asleep in her arms at last; and then she told her brief story. She was widowed; her husband had died in India from wound-fever, and she had been sent home to England; on her arrival there she found herself destitute, and had traversed the country on foot, subsisting by the casual charity of strangers. Thus much she said,

and no more. She indulged in no details of her own exquisite sufferings; perhaps they were forgotten, when she ended by saying, "Thank the Lord, the lad is saved!"

Hester lived on at the farm with her parents; and, as the old man failed more and more daily, she took the vigorous management of it upon herself, and things throve with them. By degrees, her beauty was restored, and then she had repeated offers of marriage; for the inheritance which would be hers at her father's death was by no means despicable. But she kept herself single, for the lad's sake. Wilfred grew strong, handsome, and high-spirited—like his mother, indeed, with whom, much as they loved each other, he had many a fierce contention. He never could bear to be thwarted or checked by her; and often Hester, in the bitterness of her unbridled anger, would cry, "O Wilfred! it would have been better for thee and thy mother if we had died on the door-stone in the snow that night we came home."

Still, she had an intense pride in him; and always, after their quarrels, she allowed his ex-

travagance to have free scope, though that was what usually led to their disputes. As might have been expected, Wilfred, under such uncertain training, became reckless, wild, and domineering, though he preserved a certain rough generosity and frankness of character, which redeemed his faults, and made him a favourite with the country folks, and a sort of king amongst his companions, whose superior in all rustic sports he was.

His grandfather died when he was nineteen; his grandmother, eighteen months later. Then Hester was sole mistress of the little farm. Wilfred soon began to urge his mother to sell the property and leave the dales, whose uneventful quiet fretted his restless disposition. This she absolutely refused to do; and was on one occasion so deeply irritated at his persistence as to say,—

"I would sell the Ings to save your life, Wilfred, but for nothing less!"

There was at this time living on a neighbouring farm an old man of the name of Price, who had a granddaughter to keep his house. She was called Nelly; and, besides being a small

heiress, was a beauty, and something of a coquette. Nelly had a short, plump little figure; a complexion as soft and clear as a blush-rose, and auburn hair. Wilfred fell in love. He was a tall, hardy, self-willed, and proud young fellow; but in Nelly's hand he was plastic as wax, and weak as water. She encouraged him, teased him, caressed him, mocked him, set him beside himself. She played off all her little witcheries and fascinations upon him; looked sweetly unconscious of their mischievous influence; and when Wilfred stormed and raved, she laughed in his face.

He wanted to marry her immediately; she had played with him long enough, he thought; and one evening when she had been soft and coy, rather than teasing, he put his fortune to the proof. She told him flatly she did not like him—wherein Nelly told anything but the truth, as perhaps better women have done under like circumstances.

Wilfred took her reply in earnest, and went away in a rage—mad, jealous, and burning with passionate disappointment. Hester hated Nelly,

and gave her not a few hard words; for in her camp life, the mother had culled some epithets more expressive than polite, which she used with vigorous truth when her wrath was excited. She kept her son's wound raw and sore by frequent scornful allusions to his "Nelly Graceless," and did her best to widen the breach between them with ample success.

Wilfred stayed away from the Prices for ten whole days.

This desertion did not suit the golden-headed but tinsel-hearted little coquette. She contrived to meet him in a shady wood-walk, where they had often loitered together. He was out with his dog and gun; very ill at ease in his mind, for his handsome face looked sullen and dangerous, and he would not see her as she passed by. Mortified and angry, Nelly went home and cried herself ill. Wilfred heard she had caught a fever, and must needs go to ask. She met him at the garden gate, with a smile and a blush; whereat Wilfred was so glad, that he forgot to reproach her. There was, in consequence, a complete reconciliation, ratified by kisses and pro-

mises—light coin with beauty Nell, but real heart-gold with poor, infatuated Wilfred. Hester almost despised her son when she heard of it.

"She is only fooling thee, lad!" said she, indignantly. "Come a richer suitor to the door, she'll throw thee over. She is only a light, false-hearted lass, not worth a whistle of thine."

Therein Hester spake truth.

Nelly played with her lover as a cat plays with a mouse. Wilfred urged their marriage. She would one day, and the next she would not. Then arose other difficulties. Hester did not want an interloper by her fire-side, and would not give up the farm to her son; in fact, she was so jealous of his affection, that the thought of his marriage was hateful to her. Old Price said the young folks might settle with him, if they would; but Nelly liked the house at the Ings better, and thought Wilfred ought to take her there.

When he explained that the property was his mother's for her life, she immediately accused him of not loving her, and assumed a decided coldness and repulsiveness of manner. Wilfred,

both hurt and angry, tried to give her up, but his bonds were not so easily escaped. If he stayed away from her two days, on the third he was sure to be at her side, either winning her with tender words, or reproaching her with bitter ones. Nelly must have found the game a pleasant one, for she kept it up a long time, undergoing herself as many changes of hue and form as a bubble blown up into the sunshine.

Frequently, during his lengthy visits at the Glebe Farm, Wilfred had encountered a man, Joseph Rigby by name, a dales-yeoman, and one of considerable wealth, but no education. This man was one of the last in the world to excite jealousy; but presently Wilfred was compelled to see that Nelly gave the coarse-mannered, middle-aged Rigby more of her attentions than consorted with her position as his promised wife. He charged her with the fact.

At first she denied it with blushes, and tears, and loud protestations; but at last confessed that Rigby had proposed to her—she did not dare to add that she had half accepted him. They parted in mutual displeasure; and old Price said,

as they agreed so badly, they had better break off the match, and Nelly should marry Joseph Rigby, who was well-to-do, and would know how to keep his wife in order. Wilfred went near her no more.

Presently it was rumoured in the country-side that Nelly Price and Mr. Rigby were to be married after the October fairs. Hester sneered, prophesied that the rich yeoman would repent his bargain before St. Mark's, and rejoiced greatly at her son's escape.

Meanwhile, Wilfred went about the farm and the house silent, moody, and spiritless. He was quite changed, and, as his mother thought, for the better. Instead of associating with his former companions, he stayed much at home, and again renewed his entreaties that his mother would sell the Ings, and leave the dales altogether. He wanted to emigrate. He did not care where they went, so that they got away from that hateful place. Hester was as reluctant as ever to comply; but she modified her refusal—they would try a year longer: if he were still in the same mind at the end of that period—well, perhaps she would yield to his urgent wishes.

On the morning of the Leeford Fair he left home early, and returned towards dusk—so it was said by Hester. No other person saw him until noon next day. Joseph Rigby was found murdered, and thrown into a gully by the Leeford road, that night. There were traces of a violent struggle upon the road, and the body had been dragged some distance. It had been rifled of money and watch, but a broad engraved ring which Rigby wore on the fourth finger of his left hand, was not removed. He was known to have left the market-hall at Leeford with a considerable sum in gold upon his person, for his brother-in-law had remonstrated with him about carrying so much; but the doomed man made light of his warnings.

The whole country-side was up, for the murder was a barbarous one. Suspicion fell at once on Hester's son. His behaviour at Leeford had attracted observation. He had been seen to use angry gestures to Rigby, who had laughed at him, and had offered the young man his hand, as if wishing to be friends; the other had rejected it, and turned away, shaking his clenched fist.

He had also been seen to mount his horse at the inn door, and ride off in the afternoon. Rigby started about an hour later, and alone. He was seen no more until his body was found in the ditch by some men going to their work in the morning.

When Wilfred was taken, he and his mother were sitting by the fireside together: she sewing; he reading. It was towards twilight, and he had not been over the threshold all day. He was very downcast and gloomy; irritable when spoken to, and short in his answers. His mother said to him that he was very strange, and added that she wished he would give over hankering after Nelly Graceless. He laughed painfully, and did not lift his eyes from his book.

There was a loud knock at the door. Hester rose and opened it. Three men pushed their way into the house, the foremost asking if her son was at home.

"Yes; he is in there, by the fire. What do you want with him?"

"You must come with us, Mr. Wilfred—nay, it's no use showing fight," cried a burly, muscu-

lar fellow, laying his hand heavily on his shoulder; for Wilfred had turned deadly pale, and had attempted to shake off the man's grasp.

"What is it for?" asked Hester, with her eyes on her son.

"God knows,—I don't," said he, quietly.

"Mr. Rigby was robbed and murdered last night, as he came home from Leeford Fair, and suspicion points at your lad, mistress," said the man, who still held his hand on Wilfred's shoulder.

Hester gave utterance to no frantic denials; she laughed, even.

"Why, he was at home by this hour yesterday, in this very room, at his tea. Wasn't he, Jessy?" said she, turning to the maid-servant; who, with a countenance of alarm, stood by the door.

The girl said, "Yes;" then hesitated, and added that she didn't see young master when she brought in tea.

"I was upstairs," said Wilfred.

"You had better keep all that for another time and place: you must go with us now," observed the man.

Wilfred made no resistance. His mother brought him his coat, and helped him to put it on.

"Say thou didn't do it, Willy—only say so!" whispered she, fiercely.

"I didn't, mother: so help me God!" was his fervent reply.

"You hear him!" cried Hester, turning to the men; "you hear him! He never lied in his days. He might have killed Rigby in a fair fight, or in hot blood; but he is not the lad to lie in wait at night, to murder his enemy and rob him! He is not a thief, this son of mine."

The officers urged their departure. Wilfred was placed in the vehicle which had been brought for the purpose, and driven off.

"I'll follow thee, Willy!" cried his mother. "Keep up thy heart; they can't touch thee! Good-bye, my poor lad!"

They were out of hearing, and Hester turned back into the house, cursing Nelly Graceless in her heart.

Wilfred was committed to take his trial at the winter gaol-delivery on a charge of wilful

murder. The evidence against him was overwhelming. Hester sold the Ings and collected all the money she could, that, if gold would buy his redemption, it might be done; for herself, she had a perfect faith in his innocence, and was confident of his acquittal, but few persons, if any, shared her feelings.

The best legal advice had been retained for the accused, and the trial came on shortly before Christmas. Hester was the only witness for her son. The woman Jessy's evidence damaged his cause considerably. She contradicted herself over and over again, and at last, flurried and confused, she burst into tears, crying out that she would say anything to get her young master off. There was nobody to speak with certainty as to the prisoner's having been at home by a certain hour but his mother; he had put his horse into the stable himself, the groom being absent at the fair, and Jessy could not swear that he was in to tea; she believed not; only one cup was used.

Two witnesses, labourers on a farm near the Ings, swore to having seen and spoken to the prisoner after the hour stated; they said he was

riding fast, and seemed agitated, but it was too dark to see his face. Nelly Price also had her word against him; it was drawn from her reluctantly, in the midst of shame-faced tears and noisy sobs, but it quite overthrew the attempt to prove an alibi. She stated that she had watched until dark, in the garden, for Wilfred's return from Leeford, and had not seen him go by. The prisoner never looked towards her, but murmured that he had gone home by the bridle-road and Low Lane to avoid passing the Glebe Farm. The former witnesses, on being recalled, said that it was on the highway, nearly a mile from the place where the lower road branched off, and nearer to the Ings, that they encountered the accused. These two decent men, being strictly cross-examined, never swerved from their first story an iota, and agreed in every particular. They were individuals of decent character; both had worked on the prisoner's farm, and acknowledged him to be a liberal and kind master. Their evidence was not to be shaken.

As a final and damning proof of guilt, the watch of which the murdered man had been

robbed was produced; it had been found concealed under the thatch of an out-house at the Ings. At this point of the evidence the prisoner was observed to draw himself up, and look round defiantly—despair gave him a fictitious strength, perhaps, or was it conscious innocence?

Wilfred spoke in his own defence, briefly but strongly. His life, he said, was sworn away, but he was as guiltless of the crime laid to his charge as any of those gentlemen who sat in judgment upon him. His mother, who had remained in court all the time and had never spoken except when called upon for her evidence, had preserved a stoical calmness throughout. When he ceased to speak, however, she cried out, in a quivering voice,—

"My lad, thy mother believes thee!"

Some friend would have led her out, but she refused to go. The jury gave their verdict of guilty without any recommendation to mercy, and the sentence of death was pronounced. Then it was that Hester rose on her feet and faltered that formula of words with which she had startled me in the corridor.

"He is not guilty, my lord judge. God will right him yet. It will all come out some day. I can wait; yes, I can wait. I am more patient than death. I am more patient than injustice."

Wilfred died stubborn and unconfessing; on the scaffold, with his last breath, he persisted in asserting his innocence. His mother bade him farewell, and was carried to the inn, where she had stayed, raving in a frenzy-fit. For many months she was subject to restraint, but, recovering in some measure, she was at length set at liberty. Her mind was still distraught, however; she wandered back to the dales and to her old home, but the new owner had taken possession, and after enduring her intrusions for some time, he was compelled to apply for her removal.

After this, her money being lost or exhausted, she strayed about the country in a purposeless way; begging or doing a day's work in the field, until she strayed here again, and became the Pensioner of the Holly Tree. The poor demented creature is always treated kindly, but her son's sentence has not yet been reversed in men's judgment. Every morning during the

time the judges are in the neighbouring assize town she waits in one of the streets through which they must pass to reach the court; and as the gilt coach, the noisy trumpets, and the decrepit halberdiers, go by, she scowls at them from beneath her shaggy brows, and mutters her formula of defiance. She will die saying it: comforting her poor, worn, wounded heart, with its smarting balm.

Will she find, when she comes before the Tribunal of Eternal Decrees, that she has leaned thus long upon a broken reed, or will she find her son there, free from the guilt of blood?

The Great Judge only knows.

From the Diary.

Wortlebank, June 23.

Stephen's time with us is drawing to a close. Steenie and he show some traits in common, but I hope the guidance of a judicious authority like that of Felix, may keep our boy out of his uncle's deepest errors. With Captain Dover for a companion, Steenie was all for a sea-faring life; with my brother Stephen he is all for the adventures of an emigrant; he is very vacillating, but with every change he is enthusiastic. He will be a great anxiety to us as he grows up—that I foresee.

Stephen left us this morning. He was a good deal affected, but shook it off gaily. He will go and spend a few days with Jean and her hus-

band, and on the third of July he sails from Liverpool on his return to his *home*—strange to call any place but England home.

Miss Mostyn's wedding draws near. It is to take place on the seventh, and immediately after we all go down to Crofton.

There are evening meetings in the schoolroom daily, and much ornamental work going on, during which, we have had a long story from the Portfolio read aloud; each of us taking our turn at a chapter; my plea to be excused not being admitted in this instance. The story we read, was that of a clergyman's family who went through many vicissitudes of fortune, but lived happily ever afterwards, according to Belle's special wish in story books.

ASHBURN RECTORY.

I.

"Such news, such glorious news, Anna! Lord de Plessy has presented papa to the living of Ashburn."

Anna Brooke had had a long walk through a wet August twilight from her teaching, which had tired her more than usual, and she did not hear exactly what it was her young sister said; so she deliberately put down her umbrella, and shook the rain from her shawl and dress before speaking.

"What is it, Nora? what has happened?"

"Papa has had the living of Ashburn given to him by Lord de Plessy."

"And where is Ashburn? and who is Lord de Plessy?"

"Doesn't it sound like a fairy-tale? But come in and hear all about it."

"No; let us go upstairs first. Who is in there?" indicating the parlour-door.

"Only papa and uncle Ambrose and Cyril."

"Nobody else?"

"No."

The two sisters went softly up to their bedroom. Anna closed the window, drew down the blind, and lighted a candle on the dressing-table, with the same deliberate gentleness with which in the hall she had put down her umbrella before taking any heed of her sister's joyful announcement. You might see from her most trivial actions that she was the very soul of method. The way in which she stood before the glass, sleeking her dark bands of hair, arranging her collar, and straightening her trim waist mechanically, with a far-away, pre-occupied look on her careful young face, would have convinced you that it was a necessity to her that all things should be done in order. Nora grew impatient, and bade her make haste.

"They are all waiting for you downstairs.

We thought you so late in coming home to-day, because we wanted you to hear the good news. Do be quick. There is uncle Ambrose calling for you."

"Mrs. Driver kept me talking about the children's music. Go and say I will be down in five minutes."

Nora ran off; and Anna's five minutes were passed by her standing in the middle of the floor, with her arms down-dropped, and her eyes gazing into the dark blank of the glass. She could not be thinking of the great family event certainly, for her face was very sad.

"He might have *made* time to come," she said to herself, and then walked softly downstairs and entered the parlour. Her father rose to meet her.

"Nora has told you, Anna?"

"Yes, papa; and I am *so* glad, so very, very glad." And she kissed him. "Now you must tell me all about it."

She drew a chair close by the steaming window, and sat down, turning her eyes for an instant towards the grey outside atmosphere with a quick

searching glance, and then composed herself to listen to the details which the others were waiting to give.

The story may be briefly told. Mr. Brooke was a London curate of forty-nine years of age, with a family of three children, and a very small stipend. He had taken upon him the responsibilities of life very early by marrying before he was ordained, and had been curate of the same over-crowded and extensive parish ever since; hoping against hope that some preferment would fall to his lot by luck, for patron he had none. Though his home had been hallowed by much love from first to last, that could not keep aloof many and severe privations; and this had been more peculiarly felt when, on the birth of Cyril, his wife fell into bad health, and after lingering through ten years of feeble suffering, died from sheer exhaustion. Since then four years had elapsed,—years of unremitting exertion and stringent economy. Anna was now twenty, and a daily governess; Nora was sixteen; and Cyril, at fourteen, was gathering from his uncle Ambrose, an old Indian officer, the foundation of

the military education which was to give him a start in life.

During the past spring, there had prevailed, especially in the district where Mr. Brooke laboured, a cruel epidemic. He had always been attentive, but now he was indefatigable; early and late, in season and out of season, braving faithfully imminent danger in the execution of his duty, he was always with his people. When, by the return of a healthy time, the strain was somewhat relaxed, his own strength gave way. There seemed for some weeks little chance of his recovery; and Anna had begun to say to herself fearfully, "What shall we do, what *shall* we do, if he be taken from us?" when, as if his powerful will to live for his children had prevailed over bodily weakness, he took a sudden turn, and amended rapidly. His doctor recommended rest for a short interval, or at any rate an exchange for some lighter provincial work; but this was not easy to obtain, and after two failures, he gave up seeking for it, and returned to his own heavy labours.

Anna was disappointed. She thought they

might have afforded the sum to send her father and Nora to the sea-side for a month if Mrs. Driver would pay her the half-year's salary that was six weeks overdue; and one morning she summoned courage to ask for it. Mrs. Driver asked if it would not be all the same to her next week, and Anna said, "Yes, it would;" but in such a cold tone, being hurt, that an explanation was demanded of her extraordinary behaviour. She gave this explanation in her own plain matter-of-fact way, without observing that a thin, grey-haired, elderly man, whom she often saw there at luncheon, was taking in every word she said. The money was paid to her; but her father refused to profit by it, and she had offended Mrs. Driver to no purpose.

It was just ten days after this that Nora met her sister at the door in the rain, with the announcement, "Such news, such glorious news! Lord de Plessy has presented papa to the living of Ashburn."

For the solution of this apparent mystery, it will suffice to say, that Mr. Brooke's name had many times occurred in the public accounts of

the epidemic as that of a most hard-working and energetic man. His reputation was thus familiar to many; and the person who had heard Anna's reasonable request was by that made acquainted with his poverty as well. He was a lawyer, and he was moreover the lawyer of the noble family of De Plessy, who all did their duty by deputy, even to the bestowal of the Church preferments in their gift. Mr. Lindsay suggested to his patron that the living of Ashburn, which was worth three hundred and fifty pounds a-year, could not be better appropriated than as the reward of a London curate of five-and-twenty years' standing who was breaking down under his work.

"Very well, write the letter," said my lord. "You know what to do, Lindsay."

The letter was written; and oh, the tears of joy that were wept over it at the first reading! It was life to them, hope to them, everything to them. Lord de Plessy seemed some fabulously noble benefactor; and when, in after days, he followed up his gracious kindness by a personal call upon the family at Ashburn Rectory, in the

plenitude of their gratitude they could almost have fallen down and kissed his feet. One must have been very poor to exult so keenly in the prospect of a bountiful to-morrow.

"It is a beautiful letter, papa. But where is Ashburn? is it the Ashburn in Kent?" Anna asked, when, having read the letter that her father gave her, she returned it to him. "If it is, it is a very pretty place: it is where Jane comes from."

"Yes, it is the Kent Ashburn, Jane's Ashburn, Anna. This letter must be answered at once; but we waited to tell you. I will go and do it now, while tea is got ready. And, Nora, light the fire; it is a very damp chilly night. Ambrose, you may help me, perhaps."

The two brothers went away through the folding-doors that divided the two small parlours from each other, leaving the three young ones alone. Nora went down on her knees to blow the flickering fire into a blaze, and Anna stood straining her eyes into the darkness, and seeing nothing but the dim forms of the trees in the small court waving solemnly in the rainy night.

At last she closed the shutters, and drew the crimson curtains close; then turned and stood upon the hearthrug watching the smoke struggle up the chimney.

"Ashburn Rectory! What a change it will be!" said she half aloud, but to herself.

"Won't it?" cried Cyril, shutting up his book with a clap that startled her. "We have not had time to think half about it yet. I shan't believe it till we get there. Isn't papa glad? Where is Jane? why don't she bring tea? She's lost her wits since Nora told her."

Anna rang the bell; and when the old servant came in with the tray, she busied herself in making tea, and then cutting the bread-and-butter, all with her usual mechanical precision and neatness. Yet hers was not exactly a countenance that impressed you as that of a person of cold or weak feelings. She was reserved, silent, and singularly undemonstrative; but the position she held in the family testified to a strong under-current of goodness and affection influencing her daily conduct. Much of her quietness and method arose from natural temperament;

but the being early thrown upon her own resources had developed them into character. Her shape was rather tall and slender; her face clear and pleasing, without any absolute beauty; her eyes looked cool, limpid, emotionless, and comprehended in one glance what another person might have looked at for an hour without seeing; her mouth was delicate and refined in expression, her brow expansive, and her complexion fair and pale. Simplicity of mind, simplicity of manner, and a gentle, if rather proud, independence, were her marked traits—if anything could be marked in such a character. She was clever and intelligent, but not many people found it out; she was generous and self-sacrificing, without a shadow of display. "A solemn automaton," said some; "a good and gracious woman," said others. In her own family, where it will be acknowledged she must have been the best known, the general opinion was, that it would be impossible to live without Anna.

Nora, sixteen-year-old Nora—Eleanora she had been christened, but affection always abbreviates a long name—was a great contrast to her sister.

She was a very fine creature, possessing all that brilliance, colour, and impulse which Anna lacked. Passionate, wilful, petted, but very loving—there was light and shade in her character, meteor-light and thunder-cloud. Gratify her, and her countenance shone from within like some beautiful illuminated porcelain lamp; excite her anger, and down dropped her curved brows like an eclipse over her eyes;—very lovely eyes they were, of that bluish iron-grey which varies with almost every thought; and Nora knew very well that they were beautiful. By the curve of her lip and nostril you could tell that she was impetuous as well as proud; and by the ring of her step and the straight poise of her light figure, that she was imperious. Old Jane, her nurse, used to tell her she was born to be a queen.

Cyril was merely a high-spirited, warm-hearted boy, selfish and inconsiderate, as boys usually are, but not more so. He loved his uncle Ambrose, who taught him and told him histories of Indian warfare; he thought no man living to be compared with his father for learning and excellence; he looked up to Anna as if she were

his mother, and he teased Nora and old Jane. For the rest, he was passably handsome, audacious, frank, and brave. He was a lad of fine promise altogether.

The room in which these three waited the return of their elders was the, by courtesy called, drawing-room of one of those tiny cottages which are so thickly sown in every suburb of London. In other hands, it might have been only a small, dull, stiffly furnished, comfortless closet; but presided over by Anna, a very pleasing effect had been elicited from the simplest materials. It must have been observed over and over again, by those who *do* observe, that while one acquaintance can put a touch of her own refinement and taste into woman's peculiar province, home, and educe from cheap materials a certain elegance, brightness, and an indefinable charm of comfort, another, with double the cost, provides only a necessary amount of chairs, tables, and upholstery, as uninteresting and inharmonious as the contents of a furniture-broker's shop.

When Nora had caused the fire to burn up brightly, and the lamp was lit, every corner of

the little drawing-room reflected back the flashing light either from a picture frame, or the curve of a white figure on a bracket, or the shining gold on a book-back; and yet there was repose about it too,—a repose which seemed to emanate from the calm pale face by the tea-table. Nora had seated herself on the hearth-rug as if it were December, with her white chin pushed forward, and her hands clasped round her knees; a favourite attitude of hers that reminded Anna of a certain old-fashioned picture of outcast Hagar removed a stone's throw from her child that she may not see him die; only in Hagar's face there was a passion of restrained grief, and in Nora's there was nothing but a girl's dreaminess. Cyril was already in his place, waiting for his tea with a hungry boy's impatience of delay; wondering when that letter would be done, then beating a tattoo on the table with his fingers, and next asking Anna if he might call them in the next room.

"Go and ask Jane to give you a pot of preserves—plums," said Anna. And away he sprang.

While he was gone his father and uncle came in.

"You must read the letter before we seal it, Anna," said her father, putting the document into her hand.

Nora rose up lazily and looked over her shoulder.

"Will it do?" asked uncle Ambrose.

Anna read it to the end, folded it carefully, and gave it back.

"Yes; it could not be better; it conveys all our gratitude without a trace of servility. Now, will you come to tea?"

"Jane says there is no end of plums at Ashburn, Anna," said Cyril; "and that the rectory is like a bird's-nest."

Anna cut the paper neatly from the pot, and Cyril instantly plunged a spoon into its sweet contents.

"It is a fête-day," remarked uncle Ambrose.

What trifles indicate fête-days in the houses of poor folks! When Jane brought in the toast, she apologized for not having made some currant-cakes for tea; and her master, in perfect seriousness, bade her "never mind, since the children had some preserves."

"You will have to tell Mrs. Driver, Anna, of our change of home," said her father. "We shall have to go to Ashburn next month."

"She will not care, papa. You know she only engaged me from week to week; and she said to-day that they intended going to the sea-side very soon, and that she should not need me when they returned."

"Then things will fit in capitally—Cyril, if you eat any more plums, you will be ill. You will have enough to do, Anna, in our flitting. Do you not think we had better keep Jane's niece permanently? She asked me to-day about giving her a character."

"Yes, papa; but Nora and I will make all those arrangements; don't let them harass you."

"Papa, when you go to read yourself in, may I go with you?" demanded Master Cyril, with the air of a boy used to indulgence.

"Yes, my son, perhaps you may, if it is fine. I must borrow Mr. Reeves's chaise-cart to go down in, and Josy and Thomas."

"The whole equipage—man, horse, and chaise-

cart—is to be disposed of in one lot, papa; you had better buy them at once."

"Very well, we will consider of it; they would be in good old-fashioned keeping with the bird's-nest house that we are to live in."

"Papa, does it seem *real?* I don't quite believe it yet; I don't think I shall believe it till we get there,—shall you, uncle Ambrose?"

"You will believe it fast enough, Master Cyril, when you are making havoc amongst the ripe fruit."

"Another cup of tea, Anna. Cyril, open the shutters and throw up the window a little way; the room is too warm. You are tired, Anna; are you quite well?"

"Quite well, papa, and not particularly tired. It is always a long walk from Hampstead, especially in the rain."

When the window was opened, the gentle "whushing" of the summer wind amongst the trees in the court, and the tinkle of the falling rain upon the paved footpath, made a pleasant murmuring accompaniment to the singing of the kettle on the bar. There was a short silence, during which every one in that family circle

appeared to be dealing with some inner thought, more or less glad; then the talk recommenced by uncle Ambrose asking his brother if there were any books in the house in which information touching the noble family of De Plessy might be found. Yes, there was the county history of Kent; and when the tea-table was cleared, Cyril fetched it from the bookcase in the other parlour, and uncle Ambrose and he sat down to study it, while the girls brought out their work-baskets. Nora was idly disposed, and scarcely set a stitch a minute; but Anna sewed as swiftly at her brother's new shirt as if Ashburn and Lord de Plessy had never been heard of; only now and then, when the wind came with a louder gust through the branches, and the rain fell a little faster, she seemed to listen for a moment towards the open window.

"Here is an engraving of Plessy-Regis; what a grand place!" cried Cyril. "Come and look, papa."

Nora leant over the table to catch a glimpse too, and uncle Ambrose turned the book towards her.

"Oh, I should like to be mistress of a house such as that," said she.

"Now let us read what it says about the family. Norman of course—De Plessy. The name is not historical, Philip; you don't remember it in any of the old chroniclers, do you? There is nothing remarkable mentioned here. Let me see? Vanbrugh built the house; fine collection of pictures; Gibbon's carvings; copies in marble of antique groups. Gardens laid out in the Italian manner; extensive deer-park, and fine sheet of water; some of the noblest timber trees in England. Family mausoleum at Larkhill, an elevated part of the grounds from which the sea is visible. Here is a picture of it, half as big as the house. The name Plessy-Regis, or King's Plessy, dates from Henry VIII.'s time; that monarch having taken refuge there when the sweating sickness raged in London. The old house was pulled down by Lord Hugh de Plessy, and the present structure erected by his son."

"Here is Ashburn, papa. 'A village picturesquely situated by the river Darrent. A rectory rated in the King's books at 4*l.* 10*s.* 8*d.*

The church is an interesting specimen of the early Norman architecture.' That's all; there is no difference between this village and another. Anybody else want the book? Nora? Then you must put it away yourself when you have finished."

Nora gladly threw her seam aside for a longer study of the home that was to be; and sat over the volume profoundly interested until, at half-past nine, her father rang the bell for Jane and her niece to come to prayers. Anna then folded away her work, and, with a low sigh of disappointment and a last look out into the rainy night, shut down the window, and drew the curtains close. A grateful mention of special benefits that day received concluded the short earnest prayer, and gave even to Cyril an impression of substance about what he was half disposed to call "too good to be true." A few more words about the fireside, and then the three young ones went upstairs to bed, leaving their uncle and father to talk over the great event till past midnight.

II.

"Anna, I forgot to tell you that Mr. Hartwell came yesterday afternoon, while you were out. I could think of nothing but charming Ashburn."

"Did he, Nora? Was he here long?"

Nora's forgetfulness had cost her sister a very unquiet night. She had an interest in Mr. Hartwell, and had been blaming him in her own mind for a little neglect. They had been engaged two years, and were to marry when she was of age.

"He did not stay above ten minutes; for papa was gone into town, and uncle Ambrose was busy with Cyril."

"Had the letter about Ashburn come?"

"No; or if it had, it was not opened. Papa left soon after breakfast, and ever so many papers came before he got back. I believe the midday post brought it. He won't like your going away from London, will he?—Mr. Hartwell, I mean."

"He can come down and spend Sunday with us. If he should come while I am away to-day, Nora, will you keep him to tea?"

"Yes, if he will stay; I tried yesterday, but he said he had an engagement for the evening. Don't you think he is very gay, now?"

"He has a great many friends."

There was a short silence, during which Anna dressed herself to go to her teaching at Hampstead.

"It often strikes me as very odd how you two, who are so different in everything, should have contrived to fall in love," said Nora.

"Extremes meet, Nora," replied her sister. "Good-bye; I will try to be back earlier than I was yesterday. Come and meet me, if it is fine."

It was a deliciously cool, clear morning; and though Anna was late in starting, and she had a three-mile walk before her, she could not prevent her busy thoughts beguiling her into lingering by the green hedgerows and on the dewy footpaths, when she came to them. Insensibly the balm of August raised her spirits; and, as fancy is independent of time, she contrived to hope, fear, doubt, prefigure, and settle much in the space of an hour. Her mind ran princi-

pally on John Hartwell's visit of yesterday in her absence. He knew she was always at home by dusk, why had he not waited? And as for his evening engagements, were they not becoming more and more frequent? so frequent that they had only met once during the last fortnight, and then he was out of humour. Anna tried to think that she might have been mistaken about that; but she was not. There was something mysterious in John's manner now; he was unsettled and restless; his countenance was anxious and fevered, and he would not tell her why, but put aside her questions with some idle excuse that could not satisfy her.

The Hartwells were people of property, living in an expensive, showy style; and John was clerk in a bank, with a very handsome salary, which never sufficed for his wants. He had told Anna that his father would start them in housekeeping when the time came, and that would be soon enough to practise economy. Notwithstanding the intended connection between the two families, their intercourse was limited to occasional morning visits. Anna would have liked to be more

friendly, but she could not accommodate herself to the manners and tastes of John's relatives. His mother had an insatiable taste for gay society and great people; and her life was made a toil of a pleasure in the pursuit of high acquaintance, who despised while they made use of her. His sisters were both handsome, lively, and accomplished girls, without an idea beyond present amusement. They thought John was quite throwing himself away, and were not careful to conceal this feeling from Anna, who was profoundly hurt by it. The engagement had been formed when she was only eighteen, on a slight intimacy contracted at Mrs. Driver's Christmas parties, to which she was invited because her pianoforte-playing was useful; but as Mr. Brooke and uncle Ambrose disapproved of it altogether, and the Hartwells were far from cordial, its fulfilment was by general consent deferred for three years; everybody but the two young people themselves hoping that in the long interval they would change their minds.

But full two years had now elapsed, and Anna still regarded John as the handsomest, gayest,

kindest, noblest creature in the whole universe. Her love for him was an enthusiasm, and her estimate of his merits a complete delusion; and between her delusion and her enthusiasm, she generally contrived to be very happy, as most of us are while those pleasant things stay by us; indeed, permanence is all they want to make life Paradise.

She was full half an hour late when she arrived at Mrs. Driver's nondescript villa at Hampstead; cheerful enough, though she had run over in her mind all the plain facts above recorded, because her hope was of a very tenacious nature, and her faith in John so perfect that, notwithstanding adverse signs, she chose to think that all was running smooth with her love, and that the fault of her sometimes uneasy heart lay entirely in her own weakness.

Mrs. Driver, however, put a speedy end to her visions by sweeping down upon her like a whirlwind the moment she entered the schoolroom, with a frown on her brow and reproof on her fluent lips. "Late again, Miss Brooke; look at the clock," said she, pointing to the time-piece on

the mantel-shelf. It was ten instead of half-past nine, and Anna naturally supposed it must be forward; but Mrs. Driver, who was never convicted of a mistake in her life, and kept everything in her house, clocks not excepted, under the most rigid discipline, drew from her pocket a large chronometer, and bade Anna look at that, for it was *never* wrong. Anna consulted her own irregular little French watch before she would be convinced, and then she blushed an apology.

In the evening, as was generally the case when Anna was in haste to get home, her pupils kept her answering a hundred trivial questions, and then, as it was so late, insisted upon her making tea for them in the schoolroom, and having some herself before they would let her go. When she was at last released, it was growing dusk, and the fields had begun to look grey and quiet. She met a few people sauntering homewards, or come out from the great dizzy city to breathe the pure air after a long day's toil; but she did not meet John Hartwell, or uncle Ambrose, or Nora. Nora had walked earlier in the day, and John

Hartwell had never been; but there was a note for her from one of his sisters inviting her to tea, and asking her to take all her new music with her, the next day.

"It is the music they want, Nora," said Anna gently, with a pang that this opportunity of seeing John must be lost; "so will you send Jane's niece with it in the morning? I will write a line of excuse for myself. I promised the little Drivers to stay with them to-morrow night: they have a child's party."

"Very well, I'll remember."

Nora was deep in the perusal of a new book, and did not observe how pale and disappointed Anna looked. But Anna Brooke was not of the stuff of which heroines are made; she did not gloom all night because John Hartwell had not come; she simply felt grieved in her own mind, and said nothing about it. She made tea, and sewed at Cyril's shirts; and when uncle Ambrose asked her to sing, she sang three or four of his favourite English ballads as pleasantly as if some one else had been there; only she did say to herself rather woefully before she fell asleep,

"I wish I could see John; it is so long since I have seen him."

III.

She was rewarded the next morning by meeting him on her way to Mrs. Driver's; and he turned to walk part of the way with her, saying he had come out early for the purpose. Anna felt infinitely revived, and looked up in his face with an innocent joy that made her almost beautiful.

"You will be at our house to-night, Anna; I made Louy write for you," said he. "It is only a quiet party—people you know."

"I am very sorry, John; but I have promised the Driver children to stay with them. I don't go there any more after Saturday, and I have great news to tell you; you will never guess what it is."

"What is it, Anna? You have not vexed Mrs. Driver, have you? She is a mischievous woman where she takes a dislike."

"No; nothing of that kind. It is that papa

has had a living in Kent presented to him—Ashburn; do you know the place?"

"Then you will be taken away from London. You cannot expect me to rejoice very sincerely in *that*."

Anna's heart bounded, as it always did at the slightest expression of John's affection, and a soft, delicate colour suffused her cheeks. "We shall not be very far away, John," said she.

"Too far for me to drop in to tea once or twice a-week. How many miles is it off?—ten, twenty, thirty,—how many?"

"I cannot say exactly, but it is within a ride or drive; it is near Plessy-Regis, if you know that place."

John Hartwell did not know it; and Anna's news seemed to have discomfited him no little. His countenance was very overcast and preoccupied, and Anna soon perceived it.

"What is the matter, John?" she asked, watching him gravely. "Has anything gone wrong?"

"I don't know whether to tell you or not," said he. "If you were like my sister Louy, I would in a minute; but you are such a dear,

peculiar, upright little soul, that you would be dreadfully shocked, though it is such a mere trifle."

John's restless eye and uncertain tone gave his words the lie; and Anna's heart throbbed with a fear that she had never felt before, but she put a restraint on herself.

"Tell me what it is, at all events; you can trust me, John," said she, quietly.

He looked at her for half a minute without making any reply, as if doubtful what to do,—whether to give or to withhold his confidence; but at last said, "I have got into some money difficulties."

Anna breathed a sigh of relief. "Is *that* all?" thought she.

"It is not much to speak of, but I dare not tell my father: he hates extravagance; and certainly this time I have rather overstepped the mark," added John, with ill-affected carelessness.

"I would tell him, if I were you. Why are you afraid of him?"

"Oh, Anna, I wish I could stir you out of your apathy. Say something angry and savage,

but don't look at me in that meek, trustful way; it makes me feel as if I were one of the vilest wretches breathing!" cried John, with vehemence.

"What in the world do you mean? I never saw you in this way before," exclaimed Anna. Their eyes met. "Tell me, John, only tell me you have not done anything wrong?" she entreated.

He gnawed his nether lip, and repeated her last word twice over: "Wrong, wrong; isn't it always *wrong* not to have any money to pay your bills? What do you suspect me of?"

"Nothing, dear John, nothing; but your speaking in that wild way startled me."

"Anna, I'll tell you what I've been thinking of—going to America," said he, suddenly.

"America!" echoed Anna, in dismay. "What can have put that into your head? Oh, John, there is something you won't tell me!"

"Louy would go with me in a minute, if I asked her; but you are not like Louy."

"My father would never hear of my going so far away, John——"

"You don't understand that I want you to

trust me, and not say a word to anybody—not to your father, or any of them at home. Louy would."

"I can't do that, John, it is impossible; you know I never could," replied Anna, with tears in her eyes.

"Then the next best thing you can do will be to keep a dead silence on what I have said to you this morning, or you ruin me."

"John, *what* is it that you keep back from me; tell me what it is that makes you look so wretchedly ill?"

"I *have* told you; a money difficulty that I don't see my way out of clearly. I think I shall tell my father, after all."

"Oh, yes, John, do, and don't put it off; for those things always seem to get worse when you delay. You have lightened my mind by that promise."

"I wish I could lighten my own as easily. I must go back now, my dear good child. Anna, I wish they had let us marry two years ago; you would have kept me straight. I never could bear the reproach of thy bonnie eyes full of tears."

They were standing holding each other's hands,

and John looked into Anna's face with a shrinking hesitation quite unintelligible to her. She laid it to the account of his tender conscience and his fears of her reproaches—as if she ever could or would reproach him.

"Good-bye, John; go to your father to-day; promise me again. No; I cannot stay any longer; I was late yesterday, and I shall be late again to-day."

"I give you my word, Anna; give me yours that not one syllable of what we have been talking about shall transpire through you to any living soul."

Anna promised, and bade him not doubt her.

"I only doubt your courage, neither your truth nor your love, Anna," said he. "I wish you could have come to us to-night; I have so much to say to you, and there is no time now."

"I would come if I could, dear John, but I cannot. When shall I see you again; on Sunday?"

"Yes, and perhaps before. Think about my American plan—I am in solemn earnest, Anna; if you would consent, I would go to-morrow."

"No, no, don't think of it; it is a bad scheme altogether. Now, good-bye for the last time."

John let her hand go, and stood looking after her for a minute or two, as she almost ran to make up for delay; she paused a second, and turned her head just before going out of sight, and waved her hand slightly.

For a young man full of health and strength, John Hartwell carried a very haggard countenance, as he returned over the fresh fields gnawing his restless lip: it must have been a heavy debt indeed to be such a nightmare on his spirits; for it sent him to his desk that morning as uneasy as ever that man could be who, having pledged his soul to the devil, sat waiting in misery until the bond was forfeit. As for Anna, she was disturbed, but happy; for the first thing that a woman requires from the man she loves is that he should love her; and of this she considered John had given great and undeniable proof by his proposition that she should deceive everybody, trust herself entirely to him, and go off secretly to America. And with regard to his money difficulties, what were they? He was too much

troubled about them, she was sure. He ought not to exceed his income, or be extravagant; but if he *did*, it was no irreparable sin. He would tell his father, who would lecture him, perhaps, and then make all straight; for he was a rich man, and not illiberal; and he was quite devoted to John. Anna had a talent for theoretically smoothing life's hard places; but it was rather beyond her skill to unravel the tangle that her lover had made of his.

IV.

The circumstance of Mr. Brooke becoming rector of Ashburn reconciled the Hartwells to an engagement which they had been accustomed to regard as far below the deservings of the only son of their house. "It was not money they cared for so much as connection," as Mrs. Hartwell remarked to her confidential friends; and now that Anna's father had been taken by the hand by such a noble and powerful patron as Lord de Plessy, there was no saying to what eminence he might rise in his profession—archdeacon, canon,

dean, bishop, perhaps! The ambitious lady's towering imagination quite carried her off the feet of her judgment.

There was in consequence a great family gathering at Mr. Hartwell's house, for the purpose, as it were, of publicly adopting the Brookes, especially Anna, into their bosoms, and of setting the seal of approval on what had hitherto only been whispered as a meet subject for condolence. John himself protested against this demonstration as a piece of unnecessary fuss; he would much rather have had Anna by herself; but his mother insisted on the expediency, the propriety, and the absolute obligation they were under to receive the other members of her family upon their accession of dignity; and she had her own way.

"When Mr. Brooke was a miserable curate, it did not matter," was her remark on the occasion; "but now that he is rector of Ashburn, we owe it to ourselves to show him a certain respect."

The invitation, including uncle Ambrose and Cyril, was accordingly sent and accepted, though two at least, Nora and her uncle, would gladly

have declined; but Anna said there was no excuse, and they must go to please her; so they went.

The entertainment had been got up regardless of expense; partly to impress the Brookes with the splendour of the alliance they were about to form, and partly to encourage the nascent attentions of a very rich and foolish young man of ostentatious tastes to the eldest daughter, Sophia. All the Hartwells who were presentable had been collected to give force to this friendly demonstration, which, perhaps from the many efforts to make it succeed, turned out a deplorable failure. The guests were almost strangers to each other, and their component elements would no more amalgamate than oil and water. Uncle Ambrose described his own feelings afterwards as similar to those he experienced at a pantomime, where, notwithstanding the glare and glitter, you are conscious that all is sham. Mr. Brooke, while listening to his hostess's vapid and inflated speeches, could not help thinking in his benevolent heart what a very unpleasant mother-in-law she would be for his dear Anna. The aspirant to Sophia

was troubled in his mind as to the solidity of the silver corner-dishes and the enormous *épergne;* Nora was uncomfortable because old Mr. Hartwell patronized and my-deared her; John was thinking about *that bill* that was coming due so soon; and Anna was restless because John looked gloomy: nobody was thoroughly happy except Cyril; for the world had not begun to dash his feast with wormwood yet, and he found everything toothsome and delicious. Above all, Mrs. Hartwell was troubled, and her trouble was twofold: in the first place, she had indiscreetly boasted to her sister-in-law that very morning that Ashburn was worth a thousand a-year, and at every turn of the conversation she dreaded an exposure; and in the second, the faithful Thomas of the establishment had found means to exhilarate himself so successfully, that he was constantly coming into collision with Mrs. Arthur Hartwell's man, and dropping plates short of the table, besides other and minor delinquencies. The expression of superiority and lofty scorn on Mrs. Arthur's plump countenance was gall and wormwood to the giver of the feast; and it was felt a relief when

the ignominious failure ended, and the ladies adjourned to the drawing-room.

But matters were not much mended there. It was one of those grandly furnished apartments for which money had done everything, and good taste nothing. The satin damask had been denuded of its chintz covers, as also had the ornamental pieces of tapestry-work; but the worsted-parrot screen, and the Great Mogul on horseback, and silk-canvas screen, and the roses and poppies blushing all over downy cushions and Elizabethan chairs, were all old acquaintances; nobody *could* make conversation about *them*. The annuals on the round table had run to seed long ago, and no new ones appeared; even Anna, rare guest as she was in that state room, knew every one of the round-eyed gazelles and lights of the harem therein depicted perfectly well by sight.

The younger members of the company had from the beginning of the evening, according to sex, conceived a violent indignation and jealousy against Nora for looking so proud and so perfectly beautiful; so that while she retired alone into a sofa-corner, Sophia Hartwell and her cousins

formed a party in the bow-window for the purpose of criticizing the make and simple materials of her white muslin dress. Louy, the youngest daughter, and John's favourite sister, took possession of Anna, and carried her off to the piano; where, with a running accompaniment of music to drown their voices, they talked of John without pause. Meanwhile, Master Cyril, who had been ordered upstairs by his father, was enlightening the insidious Mrs. Arthur Hartwell with regard to Ashburn in a manner which caused the hostess to designate him, in her own mind, "a shameless boy;" meaning thereby, that he was so insensible to the world's good opinion as absolutely not to endeavour to make himself or his family appear any greater or more important than they really were. And poor Mrs. Hartwell herself,—being obliged to sit, and be silently civil to a deaf great-aunt of her husband's, who had a great deal of money to leave to somebody,—was reduced to console herself for her sister-in-law's triumphant aspect at her annoyances by recollecting that she had once heard her daintily described by a connoisseur in feminine beauty as "a fillet of veal on castors."

"And have you been down to Ashburn yet, Mr. Cyril?" inquired that fair and plump person in her sweetest company-voice. Cyril was in jackets still, and being, like all young male animals, peculiarly open to the flattery of being addressed as a man of mature years, he suffered himself to be drawn out quite to her satisfaction.

"No; we all go down there next week."

"You must be very glad. What a change it will be for all of you! I suppose the house and grounds are very beautiful, are they not?"

"Anna says it is a queer old house, almost buried in creepers, but very comfortable; and there is an orchard and a flower-garden."

"Indeed! No more than that? I understood that it was quite a mansion, environed with park-like grounds."

Mrs. Arthur elevated her voice that her mortified sister-in-law might hear her.

"With his splendid income of a thousand a-year from the living, it surprises me that the late rector did not build a more suitable residence."

"But Ashburn is not worth a thousand a-year,

or anything like it; it is three hundred and fifty at most, papa says."

"Ah! then I have been altogether misled by my informant," cried Mrs. Arthur, darting a malicious glance at her sister-in-law, who pretended not to see her. "And is it easily attainable, Mr. Cyril? How do you go down?"

"My father has bought Mr. Reeves's chaise-cart and the pony Josy—I dare say you have seen him drive into town in it many a time. We go in that; for it holds four comfortably, and I pack in anywhere. And he has hired old Thomas too, for we could not do without a manservant in the country; you know that is impossible where there is a garden to attend to."

At the mention of this magnificent acquisition, Mrs. Arthur could not forbear an indulgent smile. The chaise-cart was just such a rattletrap as Noah might have driven his wife to the ark in, had they been personally like their straight-skirted representatives in the children's boxes of Dutch toys; and Josy and Thomas were in perfect keeping with it.

"I have known Josy many, many years, and

his master also," she said, affably. "You will be quite out of the world. Do your sisters like the prospect of ruralizing so completely?"

"Yes; we all think it will be a glorious change. Nora does, I know. Nora, don't you revel in the idea of Ashburn?"

Young Nora came out of a profound reverie, which almost portended sleep, to ask what her brother said; and leaving her sofa-corner, stood before Mrs. Arthur fair and shapely and pure as a lily.

"Ah, my dear, you were not born to blush unseen," said that lady, warmly, admiring, in spite of herself, the perfect grace of the young girl; "you were never meant to waste your sweetness on the desert air!"

"Ashburn is not a desert, but, on the contrary, a very beautiful and fruitful place," replied Nora, coldly.

"It is your modesty, my love, which will not allow you to understand a pretty speech," said Mrs. Arthur, significantly; "and that modesty becomes you as the blush becomes your cheek. I am no flatterer; I only intended to say, that it is

a pity to bury so much beauty in the country, where you can have no society. We shall be happy to welcome you at our house sometimes, when our families are connected; I always like to give what pleasure I can to young people in the way of parties."

"Thank you, Mrs. Arthur, you are very kind," returned Nora, with a bend of her stately head.

"My sister does not understand the fine art of party-giving; it is quite an art, my dear. If you look round, you will see everybody is weary; it is always so where the hostess is without tact."

Nora had just eaten of Mrs. Hartwell's bread and salt, and had much too fine a sense of the sacredness of hospitality to join in or respond to this sneer; so Mrs. Arthur returned to the theme of Ashburn.

"Is Ashburn in a good neighbourhood? Are there many nice sociable families about?" she inquired.

"I cannot tell you, Mrs. Arthur, indeed. There is Lord de Plessy's house three miles off; but we don't know anybody else, even by name."

"You can hardly count the De Plessys as

neighbours, my love. People of that class are so very exclusive; they live quite in a set of their own."

"Do they? Well, I know nothing about them, except that papa has to thank Lord de Plessy for the living; he must be a good man."

"I did not wish to insinuate that your beauty would not embellish any, the very highest, society, my dear—pray don't misunderstand me. And as for being good, those people, they have nothing else to do, and it would be a scandal if they were not. They have no temptations to resist like poor folks; if they wish for any indulgence, they have money enough to buy it. Yes, it may be truly said, they walk through life on velvet."

"Speak low, nobody must hear," Louy Hartwell was saying at the piano to Anna Brooke, who listened painfully. "If you will go with him, I will go too; I have promised him. I would sell myself for John; and so would you, if you love him. It is not a long voyage, and we should be three. Whisper; will you go?"

"I cannot do anything without my father's

knowledge," replied Anna, her breathless voice startling her by its distinctness.

"Hush, my mother is looking this way; come to the other side. John will be in a great rage, I warn you. Why won't you go? I'd travel to the world's end on a pack-saddle with any one I loved, if need were. If you look so pale, they will ask what is the matter. Sing this duet with me."

"Why does he want to go to America at all? I can't understand it. Will you tell me, Louy?" persisted Anna, instead of beginning.

"How should I know more than yourself? I take John on trust; you know what a noble, high-spirited creature he is, and how strictly my father keeps him with regard to money—that may have something to do with it."

"When he first named his difficulties and his American plan to me, he promised to tell his father, and get him to settle his debts; and afterwards, at our house, he told me he had done so, and that all was right for the present. I thought he had given up the scheme of going abroad."

"But he has not. And as for asking my father to pay his debts, I am sure he dare not do it; and

if he did, it would be of no avail. Will you begin to sing? here is aunt Arthur come to know what we are caballing about. Does she not look as if she had been modelled in a cheese-press?"

Louisa Hartwell was a handsome, dashing, reckless girl, with a most glorious complexion and large dark eyes; but she lacked principle, refinement, and delicacy: good training might have developed her into a fine character; but as it was, her devotion to John and her unselfishness were the only decided traits she had. She broke into a merry song without an effort, and Anna feebly seconded her; while Mrs. Arthur drew near, observing that Miss Brooke appeared to have taken cold, as she did not seem in such good voice as usual. Anna exerted herself and sang the next verse better, fearing to draw attention to herself by betraying any excitement.

"Did I not hear one of you young things speaking about America?" asked Mrs. Arthur, insinuatingly.

"Oh, no, aunt; we were talking about Anna's new music and this Ashburn," replied her niece, carelessly.

Mrs. Arthur looked as if she did not believe her, but said she supposed she must have been mistaken, but she certainly fancied she heard the words, "American plan;" perhaps somebody else in the room had used them, and her ear had been deceived as to where the sound came from. So she went round to each scattered group, and asked everybody who it was that had been talking about going to America, and nobody could tell her.

"Aunt Arthur's suspicions are roused, Anna, and she is a veritable lynx. If she imagines a mystery, she never rests till she has made it all out," whispered Louy, bending over the piano to reach another piece of music. "Be on your guard when John comes in. Here he is."

John made his way to the piano immediately, and spoke softly to his sister. He looked flushed, as if he had taken too much wine; and his eye restlessly sought to catch Anna's, who had seated herself at a little distance, and was intently examining a song she knew by heart.

"Well, Louy, have you talked her over?" he asked in an under-tone.

"No; but if you persevere, I think she will

give way. She is half frightened now, so be careful, and try what you can make of her yourself while she is in a soft mood."

"What does she say?"

"Nothing but what she has said before: she is not worth you, John, the timid pale thing. Beware of aunt Arthur; she suspects something."

John took up a song and went across with it to Anna, as if to ask her to sing it; but he employed his persuasive powers to a very different purpose.

"Have you made up your mind, my darling Anna? Has Louy's eloquence prevailed? I shall be jealous of her if it has," said he.

"I want to ask you a question, John: why must we steal out of England as if we were thieves?"

John winced at the last word, but said, with some triumph,—

"Then you will go, Anna; you have consented?"

"With my father's knowledge, I would go with you anywhere, John, — to America or to the moon."

"Hush, child, not so loud! You must not

mention it to anybody: I should never get away if you did; my mother would not hear of it."

"You have given me no sufficient reason yet for such a wild prank as it seems," said Anna, looking steadily in his face.

"Love ought not to ask so many reasons. Cannot you trust me, Anna? Should I ever seek to mislead you when I love you above all the world? I want my exile to be comfortable. You don't know what I risk every hour I stay in England, and I only stay for you."

"Don't play with my fears, John, pray don't! Trust me; tell me why you so earnestly desire to go, and why you must go secretly."

"But the *why* is what I cannot tell you yet; I choose to make it the test of your faith in me. *Louy* consented the moment I asked her: *she* is a brave soul; I wish you were more like her in that. I shall begin to doubt soon whether you love me at all, if you go on hesitating."

This threat had not much effect on Anna, for she knew it was but a threat; and as she began to pluck a flower to pieces, and to scatter it petal by petal on the carpet, she could not help thinking

he showed very little faith in her in withholding what was so vitally important to both.

"Are you trying Margaret's charm, 'Loveth he, loveth he not?'" asked Louy aloud; then she added softly, "Aunt Arthur has her eye upon you."

"John, for the last time, let me tell my father," said Anna, with pale resolution in her face. "Leave home clandestinely I never will. My father trusts me, and I will not deceive him. Give me leave to speak."

"No; I thought you loved me better than I see you do."

Mrs. Arthur had sidled up to her niece at the piano.

"Those two," said she, "seem to be tasting some of the bitter-sweet of courtship—a lover's quarrel."

"So it seems; Anna is often rather touchy. John wants her to sing, and she won't. Oh, yes, here she comes. Have you prevailed at last, John?"

"She will sing her own song, but not mine; she is perverse to-night," replied John, with ill-assumed carelessness.

Mrs. Arthur stood to listen to the music, apparently delighted, softly beating time with one fat hand upon the other till the song was done; then she made conversation about it,—its melody, its sweetness, the graceful and airy flow of the verse, and, above all, its sense.

"I dote on sense," said she, panting to deliver herself of something brilliant,—"I dote on sense in a song, it is so uncommon."

Louy laughed.

"Since when have you turned musical critic, aunt Arthur?" asked she.

"Since I heard you sing 'Love amongst the Roses,' my dear. Sense should never be subordinate to sound, you know."

"But many people of taste say that when the words are striking, the attention is drawn from the melody, which is the chief consideration."

"I have heard very good poetry turned into nonsense-verses by the reiterating of some particular word or words. Perhaps you are right, and the song is of no consequence if the tune be pretty. Some girls now-a-days don't articu-

late at all; they might as well be practising a scale."

"You are not angry with me, dear John?" whispered Anna, aside.

"Did you say anything, Miss Brooke? Oh, it was to my nephew; I beg pardon, I thought you spoke to me. Will you sing again?"

"Louy will; I want Anna myself," said John; and he drew her away to the table where the old annuals were.

But Louy, who observed that her aunt was on the watch, thought she could keep off her attention from the lovers better by a little conversation, and she began to ask if she had made any of the beautiful new feather screens. Mrs. Arthur had not, but she wished to hear how they were done.

"You must get a circle of cardboard, and cover it over with peacock's feathers, or any bright ones you can procure; and then, for a fringe to finish it, you must have those long, downy, white feathers from under the turkey's wings. You are not listening."

"My dear Louisa, I am sure the quarrel be-

tween those two is something more than ordinary," said Mrs. Arthur, keenly.

"I suppose they will make it up again; it is no business of ours. Did you never squabble with uncle Arthur?"

"It is so long ago I really cannot remember, my dear. We were like other young people, no doubt."

Lucy smiled sarcastically, and thought her aunt had a very short memory.

"Come into the boudoir and I'll show you some of the screens," said she, by way of releasing John and Anna from her surveillance; "they are easy to make and very elegant. I have made Anna a pair to take to Ashburn."

Mrs. Arthur allowed herself to be removed with great reluctance. When she scented a mystery, she loved to hunt it down as keenly as a hound on the trail of a fox. Her disposition was essentially one of research; and if she had been a great lady, she would have been an *intrigante* from pure love of mischief and deception.

"I am disappointed, Anna," said John, in an injured way; "I am disappointed, that's all. I

fancied you loved me, and you don't; you love yourself and your stiff, old-fashioned prejudices better far than me."

Anna drew herself up rather proudly.

"You have no right to say that, John; it is not true," said she, with a quivering lip.

Uncle Ambrose and Nora had been watching the timepiece ever since coffee was handed round, and now thought it time to go. Nora went up to her sister.

"Are you ready to go, Anna? we are all so tired," said she.

"In a minute, Nora. John, say you will give up your wild scheme, and stay quietly at home. You make me wretched."

He looked at the floor as he answered,—

"I will if I can,—does that content you?—but I may not be able."

"And you are not angry with me—not *really* angry, John?"

"I have not done with you yet; and if I go off alone, remember I gave you the chance of going with me."

Anna's smile came back.

"I'll remember, John, and not blame you. See, they are shaking hands, and papa is waiting. Good-bye."

John would go and put on her cloak, to have the opportunity of whispering a few more persuasive words at the soft moment of parting; but Anna was invincible. Her feelings were strong, but her principles were stronger. Her first answer was also her last.

Mr. Brooke and uncle Ambrose confided to each other that night that they liked the prospect of the marriage less than ever.

V.

It was one of the bright golden days of mid-September, when the Brookes took possession of Ashburn Rectory. They left London as early as seven o'clock in the morning; for though they had not more than twenty miles to go, there was a long day's work before them in arranging the furniture and putting things in order. They were pretty closely packed in the chaise-cart; Mr. Brooke being on the front seat to drive,

with uncle Ambrose beside him, Cyril between them, and the two girls behind. Old Jane and her niece had gone the night before, and Thomas was to follow later in the day with the new cart, their luggage, and other matters. They were all in the most exuberant spirits at the prospect of the change in their circumstances from the ill-paid London curacy to the good living of Ashburn. Every feature of the country they passed through, every object on the road, was invested with a novel and peculiar interest. There had been a heavy dew the night before, which the sun had not yet dried up; and uncle Ambrose, who always had an eye for Nature, bade the children observe how it sparkled on the outstretched bramble sprays, where the white blossoms mingled with the unripe purpling fruit, and how it was like fine silver tracery over the broad fans of fern in the hedgerows. And Cyril found out that some of the farmers had been leading wheat because many long straws were left clinging to the rose-briars at the sides of the lane; and also that there would be fine nutting this year from the abundant light-green clusters amongst

the hazel-bushes. Then Mr. Brooke opined from the close ranks of stooks in the harvest-fields that corn would be cheaper this winter than it was last, and so the poor would not suffer so much; and Nora showed her sister the scarlet clusters of mountain-ash berries, as a sign that the summer was past in the thick woods and autumn already come.

It was cold at starting; but by nine o'clock the sun had gathered a pleasant warmth. At first also the country was level and uninteresting; but ten miles on their way the land began to rise and fall in gentle hills. There was much wood, and from time to time glimpses of the little river Darrent, which goes down to the sea at Whitmouth, diversifying by its many windings the rich meadow and corn lands; and as the harvest was half gathered, there were on that September morning the busy groups of gleaners in the stubble, and the laden wains going heavily to the rick-yards at the farms with their golden store. Over the cottage walls and in the orchards, hung a bounteous crop of fruit; plums, purple and amber; apples, mellow and red; pears, golden and green.

It is the richest time of all the year, and the most beautiful, this ripe September; and the picture-scenes that Nature gave them at every turn of their way were living poems for memory to treasure long.

Cyril especially was in a state of excitement; all boys love the country. Uncle Ambrose offered the girls the reversion of him many times, he was so insufferably restless in his cramped position; he counted off the milestones every time they passed one, and appealed to those behind more than once to know if the same number had not been marked on two successive ones. When the tall chimneys of Plessy Regis appeared above the woods half a mile away, he uttered a loud whoop of delight; and in leaning across uncle Ambrose to get a better view, he fairly overbalanced himself, and tumbled out of the chaise-cart altogether. As he was unhurt, his father bade him shake the dust from his jacket, and walk up the hill they were coming to; so when they came to the foot of it, Anna and Nora got out too, to make Josy's burden lighter. Anna was soon left behind by the swifter-footed young

ones; and when she overtook them on the brow of the hill, they were standing to gaze in wonder and admiration at Plessy Regis.

It was indeed, at first sight especially, a very fine and imposing mansion. It faced the high road, and did not stand back from it more than a hundred and fifty yards, which space was laid out in successive terraces, planted with clumps of shrubs and flowers. The house was of red brick, coined and ornamented with stone of a very remarkable whiteness; carved festoons and pendants of flowers, little plump denuded figures, vases, cornices, and decorated pilasters, literally mosaiked the front; and long lines of windows, mathematically exact in point of size and position, added still more to the stiffness and precision of the general effect. Each terrace was divided from the one next below it by richly carved balustrades of stone, on the cornice of which stood at intervals draped figures bearing vases wherein grew bright-hued flowers, many of whose sprays trailed over and wreathed themselves coronal-wise about the heads of the statues. On the first flight of steps a magnificent peacock was

sunning his plumage, while on the upper terrace paced to and fro a party of gaily dressed ladies. One of them, a tall person in a shining silk dress and a black hat with scarlet feathers, came down and fed the bird out of her hand. It was, remarked Nora, like a scene out of some old book of ballads and romances.

"That is Lady Frances Egerton, Lord de Plessy's daughter," remarked Mr. Brooke. "She was at church last Sunday. You will remember her name as that of a celebrated toast and beauty twenty years ago, brother Ambrose." And then, in the fervency of his gratitude, after all were safely packed in the chaise once more, he pronounced the panegyric of the noble family of De Plessy, until Cyril interrupted him to say it was only two miles to Ashburn now, and he believed he could see the church tower already above the trees. Then a clock struck eleven; and an argument as to where the clock could be—whether over the great gateway at Plessy Regis or at Ashburn Church—carried them a mile farther; and during the last mile, they were all too much occupied in looking out for the first

glimpse of the new home to talk at all, until finally they came upon it like a surprise, nestled in a hollow, and hidden from the road by a double line of noble chesnut-trees.

Mr. Brooke laughed at the young ones' exclamations. There was the church, a low antiquated building, buried in ivy, and having neither tower nor spire; and a stone's throw away was the rectory itself, a grey pebble-dashed house, with two steep gables, and a little porch covered with a rose-tree in luxuriant bloom. Some tall sunflowers and hollyhocks looked over the wall, and the garden was one dazzling blaze of geraniums, carnations, pansies, China-asters, verbenas, nasturtiums, and dahlias. Framed in this gay margin, were old Jane's homely figure and cheerful face. She came forward and held Josy's head while they all got out of the chaise-cart; and then Cyril cried, in great glee,—

"Here we are at last, Jenny?"

"Yes," said she; "and isn't it a Paradise to look at?"

It was as pretty a place as eye could desire to see; and they were all delighted.

"What beautiful flowers!" exclaimed Nora.

"And there is a rookery behind the house," said Cyril.

"And the church is conveniently near," added the head of the family.

"And what a fine expanse of country to look down upon!" observed uncle Ambrose.

"And not quite out of reach of London either," concluded Anna, whose thoughts had run upon John ever since they started.

There was some feature about the place that pleased them every one; and having looked approvingly at the outside, they all went in, tall uncle Ambrose being obliged to bend his head, the doorway was so low. Quaint, old-fashioned little rooms they were when they saw them, and always either up or down a step, but with immense capabilities of comfort too.

"This must be my father's study, for it looks only into the garden," said Nora, who generally had the first word in every arrangement; "and for our sitting-room we must have that with the bay-window, that we may see the people passing on the road through the opening amongst the

evergreens. And for uncle Ambrose we must find a room upstairs, because he loves a fine look-out over the country. Oh, it will be a very happy place, papa!"

Mr. Brooke gave her a kiss for welcome, and then went out to see to Josy's comfort in the stable after his journey; whilst the rest of the family began to make their cosy arrangements in their new abode. By nightfall things were in partial order, and they all felt at home in Ashburn Rectory.

VI.

"We carry home about with us wherever we go," said Mr. Brooke, with a sigh of placid contentment, as they all gathered round the tea-table at dusk, after the day's labours were over; "even Anna's work-basket and uncle Ambrose's big book have come into play already. Could you not give them both holiday for to-night, good folks?"

Uncle Ambrose immediately closed the great volume on his knee, and deposited it on the floor

beside his chair, ready to take up at any auspicious moment. But Nora crept softly round and stole it away; so that when he put his hand down mechanically to feel if it were safe, his hankering fingers always missed it, though, in his absence of mind, he did not discover that it was really gone until Nora confessed her theft. Anna restored her work-basket to its shelf on the what-not; and then everybody looked as if they were set in for a thoroughly idle, cosy, comfortable, conversational evening.

If it had not been for the flowers that Nora had arranged about the room in every available vase, they might almost have imagined themselves back again in the parlour of the dull house in London; there were the same faces grouped about the fireside, the same pictures on the walls, and the same pretty simple furniture for use. Everything had been made to take the same position too, from the lost mother's portrait over the piano to Nora's little wicker chair at her father's elbow. They had changed as little as might be.

Perhaps the greatest alteration was perceptible

in Mr. Brooke's own face and expression. His mind being released from its burden of paltry difficulties, his children's pleasant faces shining around him, and a bountiful future assured to them, he looked as cheerful as the youngest there. He was naturally of a most genial and loving disposition, ready "to take the goods the gods provide," and to enjoy them thoroughly. During the last month his fine countenance had recovered the tint of health, his mouth had lost its downward curve of perpetual thought, and his clear dark eyes their look of fevered earnestness; and as he sat in his easy-chair, with his noble head resting indolently against the cushions, the change from the lean, over-wrought, depressed, and harassed man of only a few weeks ago was striking indeed. His brother remarked it.

"You will be quite a boy again presently, Philip; you look a dozen years younger already," said he. And the other laughed, and answered that he believed he should, only give him time.

"And you must begin to grow backwards, too, and give up saying, 'I remember once,'" inter-

posed Nora, whose privilege it was to remark on everybody's peculiarities without offence; and this was uncle Ambrose's,—always drawing on his memory of things that had happened years back for conversation, as if he were already declining into narrative old age. His character was a curious compound of wisdom, simplicity, and a childlike, inoffensive vanity. He had still a fine person, and had been in his younger days a remarkably elegant and handsome man; and though rough work and exposure to the wear and tear of an unhealthy climate first, and much study and hard thinking since, had sharpened his features and turned his black hair harsh iron-grey, a more thoroughly soldierly face and figure are rarely seen than his. When his fighting days were over, he had taken a studious turn, and now lived so much amongst his books that he had few contemporary experiences to tell. In spite, therefore, of Nora's warning uplifted finger, when he began to speak again, it was with his usual preface,—

"I remember, Philip, when we were lads, my father going to take possession of Livesay, and

how all the people poured in upon us to make visits before my mother had got things put in order. She was standing on the library-steps, helping to put up the drawing-room curtains, when old Lady Courtly was announced; and I was holding the hammer and nails."

"And I suppose Ashburn will call upon us as soon as the news of our arrival is known. I hope there will be some nice people," said Nora.

"Who are nice people, my lady fair? People who never say or do anything remarkable? Are we nice people?" asked uncle Ambrose, who often tilted playfully at his niece in return for her critical observations on himself.

Nora told him tartly that he did not come under his own description, whatever they might do, and that nice people were more rare than any other race or species.

"Nice people," continued she, proceeding to a definition, "are *nice*. They are sociable, but not intrusive; cordial, but not familiar. They give little parties without fuss or ostentation, and everybody enjoys them. They are not perpetually

struggling to be finer and grander than their neighbours, and can bear to be eclipsed without showing spite and ill-nature. And, lastly, they are never censorious."

"Then I trust there are no unmarried gentlewomen at Ashburn," returned uncle Ambrose, with his fine ironical smile.

"But there are several," said his brother, quietly. "There is Miss Mavis, who lives in a little white cottage twenty yards beyond the church; and Miss Scruple, in the square stone house with a portico at the entrance of the village; besides others to whom I was not introduced. And they are at the most dangerous age for you—verging on forty; while, viewed from some points, Miss Mavis has the air of sixteen. They are delightful women, and of immense importance in the village."

Uncle Ambrose put on a face of whimsical alarm.

"Nora," said he, imploringly, "if either of those ladies should allude in a gentle, insinuating manner to my bachelor estate—which they are sure to do at the first visit—will you mention

that I am engaged to a very charming person in Scotland?"

"Oh, uncle Ambrose, you vain man! You expect to be fallen in love with, do you? I will give it out that you have come to Ashburn in search of a wife. But who would have you, with these venerable grey locks?" cried Nora, mischievously.

"You doubt my fascinations. I remember the time when I was the object of anxious competition amongst five maiden ladies and three widows; and one of the former invested me so closely that I ran from the place in the night and went to London. For months I dreaded that she would either follow me or bring an action for breach of promise of marriage; but she contented herself instead by sending showers of sentimental and declamatory letters, in one of which she styled herself an 'ever-gushing fount of tears.'"

"Uncle Ambrose, are you not romancing just the least bit in the world?"

"No. Philip, I appeal to you. Have I not had to stand several active sieges, and been many times almost taken either by stratagem or assault?

Remember the Winterlys, the Lastopes, Agatha Trotter, and Phillipa Bluette, besides others, too many to name."

"They are old flames of your uncle's, Nora, every one; he is no vain boaster. But who was the letter-writing lady, brother Ambrose?"

"The letter-writing lady was Olivia Graves, that dismal poetess. You must recollect her, Philip?"

"Certainly I do; and I think Nora, for her lack of faith in your veracious statements, ought to be set down to learn by heart some of Olivia's verses. But still, Ambrose, with regard to that lady, does not your vanity stretch a point or two? Don't you think she may have written those letters to exhibit her fine epistolary style? Has she not had some very like them printed in her story of *The Hapless Lovers?*"

"I will compare the two sets, and Nora shall help me, by way of taking a lesson when her day comes to begin paying her addresses."

"Uncle Ambrose, how dare you? Do you think I would ever write a love-letter to anybody? I am not one of the ever-gushing sister-

hood. You will not get your second cup of tea until you make humble apology for that very rude insinuation. Shall he, papa?"

"No, I don't think he merits it at all. Listen! What is that?"

It was the prolonged and dismal hoot of an owl very near the house; and at the sound, uncle Ambrose covered his ears, and cried,—

"I was sure of it directly I saw that hollow trunk by the churchyard-gate. It is exactly like one that I remember in the orchard when we were boys at home; and in it lived the most melancholy of white owls, that used to frighten me horribly at night. Philip, cut down that haunt of owls, if I am to live in peace at Ashburn. I don't know which I dread most, the owls or the single gentlewomen."

Cyril pricked up his inquisitive ears.

"Why did you not have that white owl killed and stuffed, uncle Ambrose?" asked he.

"I could not, my boy, because, in the first place, though its hootings made night hideous, nobody ever saw it that I heard of; so to its other vices was added a ghostly mystery. I tried to

bribe our odd man to destroy it; but he refused, from benevolent principles to the animal creation; though the said benevolent principles did not restrain him from snaring hares and rabbits where he had no right."

Old Jane came in to take away the tea-things.

"Oh, Jenny, Ashburn is not all Paradise," said he, addressing her; "there could surely be no owls in Eden."

"Indeed, sir, I don't know; you'll be more likely to tell than me," respectfully answered Jane, collecting the cups and plates.

"Uncle Ambrose has not had his second cup, Jenny," interposed Nora. "Are you going to apologize before it gets cold?"

"No; you are too tyrannical. There is the owl again! Jenny, would you oblige me by taking a broom, and putting it down into the hollow of that tree-stump by the gate into the churchyard? Push it well down, Jenny."

"Yes, sir, directly I have taken out the tea-things. But if I can't reach, Mr. Ambrose, what will I do?" asked the literal Jenny.

Here the owl commenced a long cadence of

hoots, as if bitterly protesting against the threatened invasion of his rights, which made uncle Ambrose try to cower out of hearing.

"Is it possible that any Christian gentleman can have lived and continued sane within earshot of such a dissonant nightly solo?" exclaimed he. "Jenny, take a kitchen-chair, take the study-steps, get on the wall, climb up the tree,—do anything for the extinction of that unearthly bird. Go quickly; it will begin again directly. There it goes."

Nora laughed at his excitement.

"Are you really and truly afraid of owls?" asked she, as Jenny bustled out on her mission, preceded by Cyril.

"I have my fancies, like wiser folks. I remember once meeting with a very clever man who would not stay in a room where there was a wasp, and another who had the same objection to cats. My aversion is an owl; yours is, —what?"

"Puppies; bipedal and quadrupedal. Are those words in the dictionary, uncle Ambrose? Listen; the combat has begun."

Another dismal and angry hoot sounded close overhead, as if the poor bird, dislodged from its hole in the tree, had taken refuge in the thick ivy that covered the roof and chimneys of the house; and presently Cyril came running in to proclaim that such was the case.

"Then you will be sweetly serenaded to-night, uncle Ambrose," cried Nora. "You shall have your tea to support you under it."

"Not that cup, mischievous elf; there is no comfort in it; it is quite cold. Anna, give me another."

While he was gently sipping it, the owl began again; so he put down his cup in despair.

"My appetite is gone. Give me my book, Nora," said he. "Philip, would it be very wrong to swear at that bird? Hark to it, triumphing in my misery."

He rose in haste, strode to the window, threw it wide open, and hurled upwards several brief but vehement sentences at the defiant owl.

"I have sworn at it in seven languages, and it only mocks me," added he, gloomily.

"I trust no learned and respectable characters

are passing on the high-road, Ambrose. Sit down, man, and bear it," said his brother, who could not forbear a smile. "If you were an ignorant or superstitious man, I should think you took that owl's visit as a bad omen."

"Perhaps I do; but it is a thing one may grow accustomed to, like a rainy day or a scolding woman. What a very acute man Solomon was to connect those two ideas—a continual dropping and the female tongue! Yes, my pretty Nora, the female *tongue*. Learn the verse to-morrow, 'A contentious woman is like a continual dropping on a very rainy day.' And Solomon is an authority on the matter; for amongst his many wives he must have had great experience of that troublesome member."

"You are not quite correct in your quotation, brother Ambrose; but let that pass, since you have got the pith of the proverb."

"Give me my book, Nora; I tire of sensible conversation sooner than anything."

"No; papa has forbidden it for to-night, and Anna's work-basket too. And besides, when you say such rude things, I never will oblige you."

"Then, Anna, let us have some music to drown that discordant noise in the chimney."

Anna was more compliant than her sister; she sang all uncle Ambrose's favourite songs, and played Cyril the noisy march he was so fond of; and whether the owl was frightened away, or only soothed into slumber, by her sweet sounds, this chronicle saith not; but that its offensive cry was heard no more in the rectory that night is perfectly certain.

VII.

On the third morning after the arrival of the Brooke family at Ashburn, as Anna and Nora were at work on a new cover for the ottoman, and while uncle Ambrose was giving Cyril his lessons in the drawing-room, the little garden-gate clashed noisily to, and a high-pitched female voice asked,—

"But would it be quite *proper?* I would not for worlds do anything that was not *proper.*"

"We will do it first, and take the opinion of

counsel upon it afterwards, since you are so mighty particular," said a second voice.

"Single ladies," observed uncle Ambrose. "Cyril, we will fly while the course is open."

And as a smart imperative knock sounded on the rectory-door, they gathered their books together in haste, and fled upstairs three steps at a time.

"Is Miss Brooke at home?" asked the last voice.

"And *quite* disengaged?" added the second.

"Yes, ma'am. Will you please to walk in? Your names, ladies?"

And old Jane announced in the drawing-room, "Miss Mavis and Miss Scruple."

Miss Mavis was a middle-sized, slender person, who moved with a gentle swaying of her whole body, and her hands clasped in front, as if about to prefer a petition. She wore a light, washed-out muslin dress, rather trailing in the skirt, a meagre gauze scarf, and a chip bonnet, with a thin white feather curling round the crown. The general effect of her appearance was limp and colourless. Her face was thin and pale, and

rather agreeable than otherwise, when she had on her plain common-sensical manner; but at other times she had a trick of dropping her eyelids like a caricature of a modest young girl, which gave many people an almost irresistible desire to say, "Do stand straight, and speak plain, and, if possible, keep your eyes open." She had an infantile lisp also; but that weakness never overcame her in the company of her own sex; it was her peculiar weapon of fascination against the other.

Miss Scruple, her companion, was a tight, exact, methodical person, rather plump and comely, and very handsomely though quietly dressed in grey silk and a Dunstable bonnet. She had a wealthy look, while Miss Mavis appeared to belong to that numerous class of unfortunates who have seen better days; yet Miss Mavis took the lead, and was evidently a person of authority with her friend, who, indeed, was so fearful lest she should do anything not strictly *proper*, that she would never have done anything at all but for her more prompt and reckless associate.

On their way through the village they had

been engaged in a dispute as to whether it was not premature to call at the rectory before the family appeared at church; and Miss Mavis had settled it within hearing as a thing to be first done and then talked about; and though Miss Scruple inclined to think that a few days' delay would be decidedly more *proper*, she had allowed herself to be taken possession of and walked up to the door as if she had no will of her own.

After the ordinary forms of self-introduction, the weather, the harvest prospects, and the state of people's health in general, had been systematically disposed of, Miss Mavis possessed herself of the ball of conversation, and kept it up almost to herself. She had a little foible which requires especial mention, and this was the liking to answer all her own questions, whether right or wrong, to save other people the trouble of speaking. This gave a rather one-sided effect to social converse, which was not very highly appreciated in Ashburn society, where everybody, every lady especially, desired to have her own turn in it.

"We had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Brooke

as we came up the village," she began. "Was he going down to the school? We are very anxious to hear what he thinks of the school. Have you visited it yet? No. Oh, you will find it in admirable order when you *do* go; the master and mistress are married people without any incumbrance, and both boys and girls are well trained."

"Very well trained, and very properly behaved," added Miss Scruple, in a breathless pause.

"Do you intend teaching there, Miss Brooke? Oh, yes, of course you do; one may see you are an active person. Can you teach singing in parts? No, I daresay not; there is a difficulty about it, particularly with children who are not over bright."

"A great difficulty," Miss Scruple repeated, like a modest echo.

She never put forth an independent sentiment, lest it should not be *proper*.

"And how do you like Ashburn? It is a beautiful country; yes, very beautiful. Do you draw? Does your young sister draw? Just a

little: to be sure, all young ladies say so. Enough to take a sketch in pencil or water-colours? Certainly. I thought——"

"No, Miss Mavis, we cannot either of us draw at all," interposed Nora, determined to share her monopoly.

"Indeed, you surprise me! it is such a very agreeable pastime. I used to draw myself some years since; and there are many objects in this neighbourhood well worth the attention of artists —Plessy Regis, for instance; what a picturesque and truly noble study! Have you been over to see the house yet? Not yet. It *is* a long walk, I agree with you; and of course you must have been taken up by domestic arrangements. I trust our call this morning is not very premature?"

"Not *very* premature, for we desire to do everything in order and quite properly," subjoined Miss Scruple, nervously.

"We are extremely glad to make acquaintance with our neighbours early. We are quite settled," said Anna, pleasantly.

"You will admire Plessy-Regis; everybody

does. We should consider it here a mark of bad taste not to admire it. Are you fond of architecture? Yes. But you have not had many opportunities of study in that branch of art? You have not travelled much? No. Ah, but you must travel. What! you don't care to travel? That is strange in a young person."

"A woman's proper sphere is home; and there, doing her duty, she ought to be the happiest," said Miss Scruple.

Anna gave her a grateful and encouraging glance in return for this sensible old remark, and would have drawn her into the conversation, but Miss Mavis immediately resumed her gentle ripple of chat.

"Our late lamented rector was a bachelor; and he left the management of the school and clothing-club entirely in our hands. Of course we shall resign it to *you* now; and I speak of it at once to avoid any misunderstanding and disarrangement."

"As is certainly the *most* proper plan," added Miss Scruple.

"Miss Brooke being her father's housekeeper,

and holding an important position in the village, naturally supersedes us; but we shall be glad to render her all our possible assistance. You will want some little initiation into the working of our plans; and, if quite agreeable, I will bring down the books some long morning, and explain them to you."

Anna thanked her visitors, and said she should be glad to benefit by their experience; which Miss Scruple observed was the proper thing to do.

"You have a young brother, I think, Miss Brooke," resumed Miss Mavis, striking out in a new direction; "a remarkably fine handsome boy? Yes, he was taking the air in company with a military-looking gentleman when we had the pleasure of meeting him."

"That was uncle Ambrose," said Nora. "He will be so very glad to be introduced to you, Miss Mavis. Were you ever in India?"

"No, my dear; but once, *many* years ago, I was in *Yorkshire*. Do you know Yorkshire at all? No. Ah, it is a very fine county. Is your relative a single man? Yes; I thought so. I

can always tell the married aspect; it is more thoughtful, more *solid*, as it were. Well, we have some very attractive young ladies hereabouts, have we not, Letitia?" to Miss Scruple.

"Is it quite *proper* to allude to so delicate a topic in connection with a gentleman who is a stranger to us, Matilda?"

"Not quite, I think, *not* quite," said Nora, audaciously; "but uncle Ambrose is so kind that he would never wish to repress any interest in himself. I believe he intends to marry; indeed, we have heard him speak of a charming person in Scotland; but I ought not to mention it, perhaps, as it is not settled."

Nora feigned to be rather shocked at her own incautious admission, and cast a glance at Anna that almost overthrew her gravity; while Miss Mavis pinched her little scarf round her shoulders, and drooped pensively. From the moment that it was reported in Ashburn that the new rector was a widower, and had a bachelor-brother living with him, she had not ceased to build airy churches, to the altars of which she and Letitia Scruple were being for ever led by these two

gentlemen. Nora's allusion to the charming person in Scotland had quite effaced the roseate bloom from these previsions.

"Have you ever seen her, Miss Brooke?" she asked, in a tender voice. "No! What an interest you must feel in her who is to deprive you of the sweet companionship of so near and dear a relative! It will be a very painful separation, will it not?"

"But under such circumstances, resignation is most proper and becoming, Matilda. Nobody should allow their feelings to master them," said Miss Scruple, with more decision than had yet appeared in her.

"Ah, Letitia, everybody is not blessed with such a firm, well-balanced mind as yours. I was always tender-hearted. My dear mother used to say, 'Matilda, you are all nerves, all sensibility;' and she was right. My feelings were ever most acute."

"Indeed, Miss Mavis, you have quite the fragile look of a person of that kind. Anna, shall I call uncle Ambrose downstairs?"

Anna dropped a pair of scissors, and was

obliged to stoop to pick them up again to hide her face.

"No, not for worlds, my dear," said Miss Mavis, with extended hands pressed fervently together—"not for worlds! I could not bear to see any more company this morning."

Nora thought she was going to cry, and would probably have explained that the charming person in Scotland was a myth, had not Miss Mavis's foible borne her fluently along the tide of conversation once more. But her tone of vivacity was quite gone. She quoted poetry, alluded mournfully to the grave, and at length, with a touching and pensive languor, took leave, and was supported out into the garden by her faithful friend.

"You should not have repeated that nonsense, Nora," said Anna, gravely; "uncle Ambrose did not mean it."

"She was intent on making love to him—did you see?—so my insinuation will spare him that persecution. I shall make him come downstairs and hear all he has escaped." Nora's amiable intentions were, however, frustrated by a second

knock at the door. "We shall have all Ashburn here before dinner; who can these be?" said she.

Jane announced Mrs. and Miss Foxcroft. They were the wife and daughter of the country doctor; two showily dressed persons of very unwieldy dimensions and heavy features, further enhanced by a solid, sententious deportment.

"How do you do, Miss Brooke? I hope you have got over the fatigues of your journey on Monday last?" said the mother.

"And are settled comfortably in your new abode?" added the daughter.

"Yes, thank you; we are already quite at home here," replied Anna.

The visitors were seated side by side on the sofa, very upright, with their hands folded in their shawls. Big as they were, they spoke in little timid voices like school-children had up for a reprimand; and their great features, which irresistibly reminded Nora of little Red Ridinghood's wolf-grandmother, were as solemn and composed as the sphynx surmounting the grand entrance at Plessy Regis.

"Have many people called upon you yet, Miss Brooke? This is considered a very friendly neighbourhood," said Mrs. Foxcroft.

"Mamma, I see Mr. Joshua Parker coming up the road in his grey hat with the black band," announced the daughter, emphatically, craning her neck to see over the evergreens.

"Do you, Moppet? Then he is coming to call at the rectory; for he never wears his hat except when he is going to make a call—and there is nowhere to call at but here."

"And Miss Popsy is following him with her green umbrella up."

A few minutes after, Mr. Joshua and Miss Parker were announced. Anna began to wish that her father would return to help her to entertain her guests, or else that uncle Ambrose would come down; but neither of these desirable events happened.

Mr. Parker was a lawyer, with a shrewd face, and hair standing up all over his head like a brush; and as Mrs. Foxcroft took him to talk to, fortunately, Anna and Nora were at liberty to devote themselves to Miss Foxcroft and Miss

Popsy. The latter, contemporary in point of age with Miss Mavis and Miss Scruple, had a clever countenance, ludicrously like her brother's, and a pair of the quickest, keenest eyes in the universe.

"I want to know, Mr. Joshua, how you have settled that poaching affair; has the man got off, as he ought to have done?" asked Mrs. Foxcroft.

Here Miss Popsy jerked up her head, and cried, in an acrid voice,—

"No, ma'am, he has not; and all I can say about it is, that I wish the constable who caught him, and the magistrate who tried him, and Mr. Hardman, who brought the charge, may never get married. It is one of the most shameful cases in all the long annals of injustice. It is cruel! it is atrocious! words cannot express the vehemence of the indignation in my bosom! It might be put into poetry!"

Nobody could exactly tell at any time whether Miss Popsy Parker was in jest or earnest, for her eyes would twinkle with anger whilst her lips were quivering with fun or sarcasm. Anna expressed some curiosity that this exciting affair should be explained to them, and Nora seconded

her; so, with some hesitation, Miss Popsy resumed,—

"It will give you a painful idea of the inhuman, cold-blooded people you are come to live amongst; but, as the rector's family, you ought to be acquainted with all that goes on in the parish.—Hold your peace, Joshua. I know it happened before Mr. Brooke came; but they have got the man in prison *now*, and they must see him when he comes out, and somebody is sure to tell them if I don't."

"Popsy, Miss Brooke may not like to hear you depreciate her father's noble friend and patron Lord de Plessy, whose sentence it was."

"Lord de Plessy is a stilted old fool! I am a woman of independent opinions, and I choose to express them without circumlocution. I repeat it, Joshua, Lord de Plessy is a *stilted old fool!* Miss Brooke, listen to me, and you shall judge. There was a young man of this parish about to form a matrimonial connection with a girl, also of this parish; and being poor—everybody is poor here—but yet anxious to give his friends a little feast on the occasion, he caught

one of the thousands of hares that run wild in the woods and fields—it was a *very* little one too; but for that innocent transaction he has been taken up and sentenced to two months' imprisonment with hard labour by that stilted old noodle Lord de Plessy;—if he were fifty times a lord, Joshua, he is an ass! It is of no use to frown at me, I will say it; and if you are thinking about the agency, the more fool you; it is weary work waiting for dead men's shoes."

"The man's interesting position makes no difference, Popsy!" retorted Mr. Joshua, sarcastically; "neither is the size of the poached animal of any importance; the fact remains the same,—the law was broken."

"I have studied the law as long as you, Joshua, and know its trap-doors and its loopholes well enough: trap-doors for poor folks to fall down and break their necks, and loopholes for rich folks to creep out of."

"It seems a very hard decision: I always look on poaching and schoolboys robbing orchards as very venial sins," said Anna.

"But that is not the case here; it is scarcely

worse to kill a peasant than a pheasant. Country gentlemen who preserve game ought not to try poachers; they are at once prosecutors, judge, jury, and witness; they have a personal animosity against the prisoner, and a fellow feeling for each other. It is of no use shaking your toppin at *me*, Joshua; I *know* they have. This poor fellow that they have laid hands on has been made a scapegoat to bear, not only his own offences, but those of all the other poachers whom they have *not* caught. I know Lord de Plessy's vicious ways; he made up his mind before he heard a word of evidence, what he would do with him, and he did it."

Miss Popsy was so excited that she beat on the floor with her umbrella to emphasize her speech, until Anna thought she would beat a hole in the carpet.

"Popsy, you will break the stick; let me take it," said her brother, mildly.

Instead, she hit him a smart rap over the knuckles with the big horn handle, and bade him mind his own business. There seemed for a minute or two a chance of the rectory draw-

ing-room becoming the scene of a pitched battle; but Nora, by the judicious introduction of another topic, succeeded in diverting Miss Popsy's irate attentions from her brother. She remarked that Ashburn was a quiet, pretty place, she thought.

"As for beauty, it is well enough," returned Miss Popsy, jerking her head significantly; "but wait until you have quarrelled with everybody in it before you say it is *quiet*. People are always by the ears; there is not more spite in all London than there is in Ashburn."

"But I shall hope to keep the peace, and not quarrel with everybody."

"You will not be able unless you padlock your lips. Whom have you seen besides Mrs. Foxcroft and Ellen and Joshua and me?"

"Miss Mavis and Miss Scruple."

"Then you have seen the best of us. I am thoroughly acidulated with living all my life amongst law bothers. I used to have the temper of a cherub, but now I am quite a wasp. Whatever you girls do, never marry a lawyer. Do you hear me, Miss Ellen, never marry a lawyer."

The Foxcrofts were supposed to look with an eye of favour upon Mr. Joshua Parker for their daughter, who blushed a sweet confession at this advice from Miss Popsy.

"Joshua is the most tiresome man in creation, with his perpetual why and because and his proving everything. He would ask you to define plum-pudding while the sauce was growing cold; but as for gratifying any of my little innocent curiosity, *that* he will never do, *never*. Is your father a magistrate, Miss Brooke?"

"No, he is not; and I hope he will not be made one."

"That is very sensible of you. What business have clergymen on the bench,—preaching forgiveness on Sunday and sending a man to the treadmill on Monday? And then they don't know the law, and make such ineffable donkeys of themselves. I have long been occupied in getting up a series of curious cases, which I propose to publish as the *Vagaries of Justice Shallow*, some day."

Mrs. and Miss Foxcroft now rose simultaneously, and said good morning; and at the same moment

an elderly gentleman and his daughter came through the gate and up the garden. Miss Popsy had her eye on them.

"They will not come in; they will only leave cards," said she. "You won't have any more visitors to-day; it is just dinner-time for the Worksops and Hardmans. Joshua and I dine at two; is that your hour?"

Anna replied that it was, as Jane handed in two cards inscribed, "Captain Clayton" and "Mrs. Westford." Miss Popsy explained that Mrs. Westford was a widow, living with her father, Captain Clayton, at Ashburn Lodge.

"And have you had Miss Charley Wilde yet?" she continued, with vivacity; "she told me she was going to call, for she had fallen in love with one of you—I am not sure which, but most likely the young one. Nora is your name, is it? Well, it is the name of the prettiest girl in Kent."

Miss Popsy's frank way of complimenting was not offensive. Nora laughed, and asked who was Miss Charley Wilde.

"She is a young lady of large independent

property at Riverscroft, about two miles from Ashburn," said Mr. Joshua.

"What has the large independent property to do with it? Cannot people be anything without money? Don't go to my brother Joshua for information; come to me. I can tell you all about Charley Wilde, for she is my especial crony. She rides, drives, hunts, shoots, sings, plays on the piano, reads clever books, mends her own gloves, and has no nonsense about her. Miss Scruple will tell you she is not quite proper, and Tilly Mavis says she is like a man; but I tell you she is one of the salt of society, and I wish there were a few more like her." And again Miss Popsy became very emphatic with the umbrella, and looked threateningly at her brother.

"Don't be long before you return my call, mind," she added, after a short pause. "I shall expect you on Monday; and as soon as the preliminaries are accomplished, I'll give a party, and have Charley Wilde to meet you. You will not have seen Sidney Wilfred yet either. I hope you girls are not susceptible."

"Not at all susceptible, Miss Parker," said Nora, laughing. "Who is Sidney Wilfred?"

"A misunderstood and unappreciated poet. I shall ask him and Miss Mavis to my party; and you will think you have fallen into the midst of the mutual admiration society. But don't, *don't* fall in love with him; for he is a blighted being for all mundane purposes."

"Popsy, Popsy," said Mr. Joshua, in a warning tone, "whose fault is it that Ashburn is always by the ears?"

"*Yours*, sir. Now, girls, don't make recluses of yourselves; but come out into our world, and enjoy life as young people should. Joshua, what are you mooning about? Are we to stop here all day?" And Miss Popsy rose in haste, gave a single energetic thump with her umbrella, and stalked off.

Her brother took her to task for her wonderful demeanour as they went down the garden-walk together.

"I wish, Popsy, you would not behave in such a strange way. What will Miss Brocke think of us?" said he, reproachfully.

"If you are not pleased with my manners,

you had better buy me an etiquette-book," replied she. "I will read out the appropriate passages to the company, and say, 'Thus and thus we *ought* to behave, but I prefer to be my own natural self, Popsy Parker; *you* do as you like.' Stop, Joshua, I have not told those girls where we live." And Miss Popsy hastily retraced her steps, went to the drawing-room window, and looked in.

"Miss Brooke, our house is the third beyond Miss Scruple's, on the high-road," cried she, with her face close to the glass. "You cannot mistake it; it looks like a private asylum."

Then she returned, mincing her steps towards her brother, who waited at the gate, with her poke-bonnet gently inclined towards her left shoulder, her shawl drawn very tight, and her umbrella held as if it were a tiny parasol; but when she came within a few paces of him, she thumped it down on the gravel, and jerked her bonnet straight.

"Am I to look like *that*, niminy niminy *knock?*" cried she, with a snort of contempt and a charge at his hand resting on the gate. "Get out of

my way, Joshua; I have not common patience with you!"

"Don't, Popsy, don't; that pretty Miss Brooke is watching you out of the window," supplicated her brother, rubbing his knuckles.

"Turn your eyes the other way, sir. What right have you to see that she is pretty? I am not going to let *you* marry either of them, that is quite sure. What do I care if she is watching? I will tell her the next time I see her why I rapped you, and she will say I did right. Those girls have sense in them, good-looking as they are; but don't you think to meddle with either of them."

When all the visitors had been gone some ten minutes, uncle Ambrose cautiously descended to the drawing-room once more.

"Who was that hammering a short while since?" was his first inquiry.

"The most comical single gentlewoman you ever saw in your life, with a face like this," cried Nora, endeavouring unsuccessfully to give an imitation of Miss Popsy's peaked nose and twinkling eyes. "But she is very nice too. I like her; and if you are to marry any of the four spinsters

we have seen this morning, I hope it will be her. I would not object to an aunt Popsy; would you, Anna?"

"I am afraid she would be very destructive to furniture; she has really frayed the carpet by working in the brass end of her umbrella. And there is rather too much emphasis about her for anybody who likes a quiet life, as uncle Ambrose does."

"Did any lady propose for me, Nora?"

"Miss Mavis opened the preliminaries—(don't call me to order, Anna; what else could her allusions be called?)—but I mentioned the charming person in Scotland, and she immediately withdrew them. She is a very interesting person to look at, pensive and pale."

"I am safe, then; for she will spread the news, and I shall have freedom of movement. I am going to take a walk; who will go out?"

"Both of us. Let us go up the fields towards Plessy Regis," said Anna. "We shall be ready in five minutes."

VIII.

Uncle Ambrose and Anna walked along side by side in a composed and orderly manner, admiring the early autumn tints on the leaves and the beautiful clearness of the sky; while Nora and Cyril scampered about like two mad things. There was a brisk wind when they reached the high grounds towards Plessy Regis, and it excited their spirits as if they were two little children let out to play after long confinement in school. Nora pulled off her straw-hat, and carried it dangling by the strings, while the breeze made fine havoc of her long loose hair. She shut her eyes, and turned her face skywards, to breathe the airs fresh from heaven, as she said. She ran races with Cyril; she sang snatches of song that rang over the country, making the reapers in distant fields lift up their heads to listen whence came the wild elfish melody.

"Oh, uncle Ambrose, it is a happy thing to be young!" cried she, coming up to him, and hanging on his arm to rest herself, panting and

out of breath. "I never felt it like this before; it is so beautiful!"

The face looking up into his was instinct with youth and happiness. Nora had no need to proclaim it; the carmine of her cheek and limpid brightness of her eyes were witness enough that there was no canker in the heart of that rose.

"Come and run, Anna. It seems as if the wind caught my feet and made me long to rush about. Oh, you are so tame! Cyril, come you." And she was off again, racing up a green hill, so steep that uncle Ambrose was glad to make the fine prospect serve as an excuse for stopping several times to take breath during the ascent. When he and Anna got to the top, they found that chance had guided them to Larkhill; for on the edge of the opposite slope was the mausoleum of the Plessy-Regis family; it faced the park of which this hill seemed to form one limit. Anna proposed to sit here to rest, and enjoy the magnificent outstretch of scenery with the dim blue sea-line on the horizon.

"Doesn't it make you feel all glorious, Anna?" exclaimed Nora, throwing herself on the grass.

"It seems to lift me up and make my soul grow. I think one might be always good and pleasant in a place like this."

The spot where they had chosen to rest lay under the shadow of a cloud; but below was a sea of hazy light, with the sun shining through like showers of golden rain. It was a time to be still and think, and its influence crept insensibly over them all; even Cyril subsided on the turf near uncle Ambrose, plucking idly at the blades of grass, and then dropping them through his fingers. For many miles away stretched an expanse of richly-cultivated lands, well wooded, and showing the windings of the Darrent and of a greater river amongst trees and fields. Plessy-Regis Park was perhaps the wildest and most picturesque part of the view; the ground was more broken and undulating, the single trees and groups were of magnificent growth, and the dark belts of wood which bounded it full of a mysterious shadow. A little brook issued from one of these plantations, and winding below the base of Larkhill, flowed into the Darrent, after half circling the rectory-garden and Ashburn Green.

Nora was the first to break the silence.

"Another race, Cyril; we did not come here to fall asleep," cried she. "Now for a rush down-hill!" And throwing her hat for the wind to carry along, away she flew, her hair streaming out, her white skirt floating wide, and her feet seeming as if they skimmed the ground rather than trod it. In her crazy race, she did not perceive that she had other watchers besides uncle Ambrose and Anna, until, seeing her straw-hat about to bound into the brook, she cried out, "Oh, it will be in the water! Stop it, do stop it!" as two men, with guns over their shoulders, and several dogs following, came out of a small plantation close at hand. One of them made a hasty step forward to arrest the unlucky hat; but before he could reach it, it was whirling down the current. Nora stood still, rather dismayed at the termination of her chase; while the second of the two men, who had the appearance of a gamekeeper, ran forward, set one foot in the water, and as the stream floated the hat towards him, caught it by one string, and pulled it out. Nora took it blushing, and thanked him quietly; while

his master slightly raised his cap, and passed forward to another plantation at a short distance.

"What a singular-looking man!" was Nora's internal comment as she shook the wet from her hat and held it in the sun to dry. "I shall have to go all the way home without; and the ribbon is spoilt." She turned round and waved to those on the hill-top to come down, signing that she was too much out of breath to go back to them; and they began to descend at a sober pace. She was two fields off, making her way homewards as fast as she could before Cyril overtook her; for the adventure of the hat had a little quietened her.

"Did that man speak to you, Nora?" cried her brother as he came up with her. "He looked preciously grim."

"Not a word. Have you ever met him before when you were out? He has a peaked beard, and such a brown face, like uncle Ambrose. There he is again, coming from the wood on this side: we shall be obliged to meet him."

"You might as well put on your hat, Nora; the sun is enough to stare one out of countenance," said Cyril.

"I don't mind the sun; and besides, my hat is so wet I cannot put it on." Nora looked a very stately young nymph indeed, the over-bright rose on her cheek and her tangled hair notwithstanding. The stranger glanced at her from under his brows as they met, and turned twice to watch her go over the fields. She and Cyril stopped at the last stile, and waited until the others came up.

"Who was that man, uncle Ambrose, do you know?" asked Nora, swinging her hat to and fro.

"That man was the Honourable Arthur de Plessy, niece; and a charming specimen of wild girl you introduced to him for a rector's daughter," was the reply.

Nora laughed, yet blushed shyly. "Anna will support the character of the family for all manner of things good and *proper*, as Miss Scruple says," she returned, willing to excuse herself, though half ashamed of her hoydenish escapade. "But I must be allowed some young time, uncle Ambrose; I never quite felt what it was to be young before; it seems just as if I had broken loose from somewhere, and must dash about and

sing and be crazy. Don't you feel anything like that?"

"I dare not begin to analyse my sensations, Nora; for the process compels me to feel that I am not so young as I have been."

"But you will never be old, uncle Ambrose—never, while you live. There are some people who are never thoroughly young, like Anna, who seems fifty to me; and some people who are never old, like you. I should not like to grow stiff and cranky; should you?"

"Perhaps not; but since the Fountain of Jouvence is not attainable in this century, one might as well grow old with decent resignation,—don't you think so, pretty Nora?"

"That decent resignation is not an easy thing, uncle Ambrose: you must read Miss Mavis a lecture on it to strengthen her nerves. Here is papa in the garden looking out for us. Well, papa, whom have you seen?"

"A great many people, Nora: Mr. Hardman, about the glebe; and a Miss Popsy Parker, who flattered my paternal feelings by the news that I have two of the most charming girls in Kent

for daughters. She had been calling upon you, she said."

"Yes, papa; we have had half Ashburn already; and there is plenty of choice for uncle Ambrose amongst the single ladies. I incline to your Miss Popsy; there is such an honest vivacity about her and her umbrella."

"I should desire to lay an embargo on the umbrella, or else always to carry my hands in my pockets for safety, if I were he, then."

"When we return the call, he shall go with us. No rebellion, uncle Ambrose; you must; and if you are very agreeable, she will invite you to her party. Yes, papa; she said when the preliminaries were got over, she would give a party."

"Miss Popsy Parker is a very liberal woman, then: yes, *she* is quite endurable."

"That sounds as if you had met somebody who was not, papa; tell us who it was? You shake your head, but I guess. It was——;" and she stood on tip-toe and whispered in his ear. He laughed. "I knew it. And did she propose for you herself? She almost did to us for uncle Ambrose, and we declined the honour. No,

Anna, I am not romancing; it was perfectly understood between us. Papa, are there not a great many things that people know about each other without a word of explanation?"

"Run away and make that wild hair neat; Jane's niece is in the dining-room."

"That is a put-off, papa; but I know there are. *We* met somebody too: Mr. Arthur de Plessy."

"Whose servant had the civility to fish a straw-hat out of a brook, which a certain crazy girl had given to the winds for a plaything," added uncle Ambrose.

"That is one of the things that can be understood without explanation, Nora,—don't you think it is?"

"By a very acute person, papa, no other. It was an old-fashioned thing, the hat; and now I shall have a new one, for it is quite spoilt. Look at it;" and she danced it round on her hand.

"I never found out, when it was on your head, that it was not a very handsome hat, extravagant girl."

"I must have a gipsy-hat with a blue ribbon, like the ballad-maidens, papa."

"Nora thinks Ashburn is a gold mine," said uncle Ambrose.

"But she did want a new hat, papa;" interposed Anna, who would have gone in hodden grey to let her sister be beautifully dressed; "that hat had been cleaned and turned, and cleaned again and again."

"I believe you let it be spoilt on purpose, Nora," cried Cyril, mischievously; "or else why did you roll it down to the brook? You never cried out to those men to stop it until you saw it was certain to go in. If you dry it at the kitchen-fire, and iron out the ribbons, it will wear over the winter very well."

Nora gave him a flick with the straw-hat for his penurious suggestion, and bade him mind his own affairs.

"It can be turned into a summer hat for you, Cyr, if you want to practise economy; and you shall have the bows too, if you like," said she.

The appearance of old Jane's face at the dining-room window warned them to go in.

IX.

"Arthur has had a long day out shooting, but here he comes across the park, mother," said Lady Francis Egerton, who was standing by the great window of the Plessy-Regis schoolroom, still in her hat and habit, as she had returned from riding.

Lady de Plessy gathered her knitting in her hand, and went to look out also: she thought more about Arthur than any of her children. He was walking slowly, carrying his own gun, with a keeper and the dogs following, all of them tired, from the weary way they dragged their feet over the ground.

"My son is as restless as ever, Frances; I wish we could see him at peace again," observed she, regretfully.

"That you never will, unless some new love should push the old one out of his memory, which is not likely," replied Lady Frances.

"If I could have believed it would change him so completely, he should have married the girl rather than be as he is."

"It would have been far better. She was a lady born; what did her poverty matter? There was never a De Plessy to equal her."

"She was very beautiful. But it did seem such an unlikely thing; and he was so young, we thought he would change soon."

"Her death ends all that. If they had both lived to alter their minds, it would have passed; but he being sent off to India, and she dying faithful to him in spite of all, makes her sacred to him. And his feelings were always so strong, even when a boy."

"Yes. Arthur was not like the others; he did love me, Frances, better than any of my children; but now he is like ice to his father and me. He even talks of going back to India. I would do anything to keep him here."

"I think he would be happier away, mother; I would let him go; there would be more chance of his coming home settled after a few years. It must have been a terrible shock when he came back and found her gone."

"He has told you more than any of us, Frances, —you were his confidante. Has he said anything since?"

"No, he never alludes to it; but I know he was away at Riverscroft last week,—and she is buried there."

There was a short silence; Lady de Plessy stood nervously tapping the floor with her foot, and Lady Frances gazed out of the window at the grey twilight shadows stealing over the wide expanse of park, which the old schoolroom window commanded. There were some beech-logs burning on the wide open hearth; and on the table opposite was spread a cloth, cups and saucers, and a Swiss carved trencher with a loaf of bread.

Ever since her children were little, Lady de Plessy had been in the habit of coming to this room at six o'clock, when their tea was ready, to hear their small gossip and chat, for half an hour before the dressing-bell rang. The children were grown up, married, and dispersed into homes of their own now; but the old ceremony was kept up still. When there were guests at Plessy Regis, they soon found their way to the schoolroom; and when she was alone, Lady de Plessy used to go by herself, and think about her children.

It was a large apartment, grotesquely furnished with the rejected furniture of some drawing-room of long ago: rigid high-backed chairs; tables that defied anybody to stir them; a faded Persian carpet, worn bare in many a place by dancing feet that time had sobered, or perhaps death stilled; pictures of pet dogs and horses done in wonderful colours, faded landscapes, and crayon-portraits, which Lady de Plessy valued more than all the old masters in her lord's noble collection.

This old schoolroom was the room where the Plessy-Regis skeletons were kept: in it many a family crisis, many a passage of human suffering, had been transacted, as mother and daughter knew full well; and from its window had the women of the family watched the end-all of trouble wending with much pomp up the wild northern slope of the park to Larkhill, where the great mausoleum closed the prospect. It was on the second story, at the end of a long corridor, distant from any other inhabited room; no contending voices, no weeping or loud entreaty, that took place within its closed door could be heard beyond. To cross

its threshold and come within sight of some of its skeletons, must have thrilled painfully through Lady de Plessy's nerves, often, often.

"And so she is buried at Riverscroft? I never liked to inquire," said she, beating with her foot continually.

"They brought her there at her own request; it was,—if you remember, mother,—the place where they first met each other, and the last."

"Yes, I remember; she was a beautiful creature. You liked her, Frances?"

"She was not selfish or vain, she was so purely good and true; she was so different to ourselves, mother, and Arthur felt it."

The door was opened gently, and some one entered: it was Arthur himself. He would have gone back, when he saw that the room was occupied; but Lady de Plessy bade him come in.

"We keep up the old customs, you see, my son," said she.

He walked to the fireside and threw himself down wearily upon the stiff settee that stood by the hearth, glancing round the walls growing

indistinct in the twilight, with an expression of shrinking hesitation, which Lady Frances Egerton understood but too well. He had not set foot in that room for twelve years, and the last time was to take down from the wall a certain sketch, lest other hands should do it; and they two had had an open-heart talk by the fire about Arthur's girl-love, from whom he was about to be banished—whose sweet face in the flesh he was never to behold again. That time haunted the room visibly to both of them, and to the mother too.

"Have you had good sport, Arthur?" asked Lady Frances.

"Not very; the birds were rather wild."

As if either of them had come there to talk of partridge-shooting! Lady de Plessy asked, would they have some tea,—it was made. No; neither wished for any. She poured out a cup for herself, and sat playing with the spoon, till Arthur rose up with a jerk, and lighting one of the candles, took it and walked round the room to examine the drawings on the walls.

"They are all there, my son," said she; "you must see many old friends."

"Yes, mother. And do you come here every evening, as you used to do?"

"Every evening; I never miss when I am at home. I love to think of my children here; it seems to bring them around me again."

Arthur shivered.

"It must be like visiting graves," said he, in an under-tone.

He came back to the fireside, and stood with his hands behind him looking away through the uncurtained window towards Larkhill. Since he left home, the grand mausoleum had opened its doors for his two elder brothers and a sister;—how could his mother bear to come there, he thought.

Lady Frances still stood by the window; and, as if some sudden recollection struck her, sought a particular pane, and began to rub off the weather stains. She discovered what she sought; a name scratched with a diamond upon the glass,—a name which had sent her brother into exile, and which had made shipwreck of all his happiness.

He came up beside her as she was looking at

it; and drawing a long painful breath through his teeth, said,—

"You are raising ghosts, Frances."

He struck his hand against the glass sharply, the pane broke and crashed down on the gravel underneath.

"We will not speak of her any more,—she is a saint in heaven, and we are mortals waiting to forget," he added, bitterly.

Lady de Plessy turned round quickly, and asked what was that sound.

"Only a death-knell, mother," replied her son. That was the last allusion he ever made in her presence, the only words conveying a shadow of reproach that he addressed to her, touching his first love. He came back to her by the fire, and plunged suddenly into a conversation about their country neighbours,—Charley Wilde and the rest.

"I met Charley Wilde to-day, looking as eccentric as ever, and also some people whom I took to belong to the new rector's family," he said: "two young ladies, a lad, and an old soldierly man."

"We must call there next week. What are the girls like?" asked Lady Frances.

"I cannot tell. One was flying down Larkhill after her hat, which went into the beck: she was a pretty young creature, but as wild as a March hare."

From the beginning of his reply, it seemed as if Arthur had not been very observant; but in reality Nora had left a distinct likeness of herself on his imagination: he thought she had a look of his old love who lay buried in Riverscroft churchyard.

X.

Sunday morning. "Will John come to-day?" was Anna Brooke's waking thought on the first Sunday at Ashburn. It was not daylight yet; and Nora was sleeping softly beside her, in the quiet slumber which is only for untouched hearts. Anna would sleep no more, but she raised herself on her pillow to watch the dawn. The sky was all grey cloud; the stars were gone, but the sun

had not mounted nearly to the horizon. Anna thought there was the tinkle of quick rain against the glass. "If it should be a wet day, he will not come," said she; and sprang up to look out. There was a heavy dew upon the window, so that she could not tell whether there were rain or not; and she did not dare open it, lest she should wake Nora or others in the house, so she put her ear to the glass and listened. "I think it is fine," she murmured. The clock on the stairs struck five as she lay down again, wishing for morning and John's coming.

Gradually the morning broke, — not very brightly, but with a rolling mist over Larkhill and the high grounds to the north; it seemed undecided yet whether the day would rain or shine; there was a pale yellow glimmer coming and going amongst the eastern cloud wreaths that tantalized Anna's hope. "I know if it be wet he will not come," she repeated, as if the sky might hear her, and prove benign in pity. She stood by the window watching until it was full daylight, when Nora awoke.

"Oh, Anna, there is no fear; it will be a

lovely day," cried she, divining Anna's anxiety by her position.

"Do you think so? I hope it will," replied she, abandoning her look-out post rather cheerfully; "I think there is promise of it."

"Yes. 'Evening red, morning grey, are the sure signs of a fine day.' Do you expect John early, or not till afternoon?"

"He did not say. He could not be here much before dinner."

"There is not time for another dream, is there? Ah, no; here comes Jenny. Jenny, how does the morning look from your side of the house?"

"Not over bright, Miss Nora; I think there'll be rain before noon, if the sun doesn't get out."

"Oh, Jenny, we want a fine day."

"Then you should have sent and bespoke one at the weather-office, Miss Nora, for I'm afraid you'll be disappointed."

"Jenny, I have known you prove a false weather prophetess before now, and *I* believe you will again."

"If you are looking for anybody, Miss Nora, that a shower of rain will keep away, give him

up, he's not worth *that;*" and old Jenny gave a flip of her finger and thumb as she went out and shut the door. Jenny had been nurse to the two girls, and took upon herself to exercise occasionally a sort of mothership over them. For some reason—nobody, perhaps not even herself, could tell what—she had, from the beginning of the intimacy between Anna and John Hartwell, conceived a keen dislike to him, and never allowed any opportunity of covertly insinuating it to slip by unimproved. Nora was rather vexed at herself for giving the old servant an opening now; for Anna was very quiet, and not in good spirits.

"I don't think he will come, Nora," said she, with a sigh; "I don't feel as if this was going to be a pleasant day."

Nora was silent for a minute or two; then she said, with a pretty grave air of reflection,—

"Anna, do you think it possible that you and I could ever change into sentimental piping bodies like Miss Mavis?"

"No, I hope not. Why do you ask that?"

"It was a thought that came into my mind at

hearing you sigh. I don't think I could ever have patience to see anybody mooning about a house, or sitting like Patience on a monument smiling miserably at nothing in particular, could you?"

"We cannot tell yet, Nora. You see, we have not had any troubles to bring us into that melancholy state."

"Troubles, Anna! Were we not as poor as poor could be, and had we not to look twice at every sixpence before we ventured to spend it? What do you call troubles, if those were not troubles? And yet we were always as gay as Roger Bontemps that uncle Ambrose quotes."

"Those were *cares*, Nora, darling; troubles are more selfish things; we deal with them individually, and have to bear them by ourselves. It would have been a trouble if, instead of being gay, us you said we were, we had always been fretful and discontented; or if one of us had turned out a disgrace to our father: and there are other troubles besides, more private still, that we have heard of, though we have not been compelled to taste of them. Yes, Nora, I think

people may seem selfish in their sorrow sometimes without losing all claim on our pity."

"I am determined to have some pleasure in my life, and as little trouble as may be; that is wise, Anna, is it not?"

"Be as happy as you can, Nora; but don't be hard on the unfortunate."

A heavy plash of rain against the window startled them. Anna looked up and sighed again involuntarily. Nora smiled: she was not selfish, and she was not hard; but she could not comprehend that John Hartwell's coming or staying away deserved a sigh; she did not like him herself, and was ever more and more astonished at Anna's devotedness. By the time the two girls went downstairs to breakfast, there was no doubt left about the day; the rain was pouring in torrents.

"This is bad for the harvest," observed Mr. Brooke, looking out of the window at the drenched chesnut-trees. "And, Anna, I am afraid we shall not see Mr. Hartwell to-day. The change in the weather is very sudden."

"Yes, papa. It is not likely that he will come

through such a rain, unless he had set off before it began: it was fair for an hour or two this morning. But I shall not expect him."

In spite of her declaration that she should not expect John, she had a lurking hope that he *might* have started very early, to get to Ashburn before the morning service; but a few hours dissipated that possibility, and she entered the quaint old church strong in the indulgence of another fancy: though it rained at Ashburn, was that to say that it rained in London? It might be quite fair there; and if John once set off, he would never turn back for a shower. Such a meagre crumb of hope was better than nothing to Anna, and shows with what tenacity those quiet undemonstrative women, whom people in general call cold and hard, cling to their hopes and trusts.

XI.

Ashburn Church was in no particular style of architecture, and it had been so frequently restored and beautified that but little of the original edifice remained. It was cleanly whitewashed, monu-

ments not excepted, and a full-sized figure of Time standing on a scythe, which was boldly cut in outline on the stone wall near the doorway, had been half obliterated by the frequency of this process. On the screen which separated the chancel from the body of the church was fixed the list of degrees of affinity within which marriage is forbidden; and just inside, elevated a single step above the others, was a large square pew, closed in from vulgar eyes by a crimson curtain. Here the members of the noble family of De Plessy were already assembled when uncle Ambrose and the young ones entered the rectory-seat opposite. Nora's wandering eyes were not long in perceiving the dark-bearded man who had witnessed her chase down Larkhill; and accidentally meeting his glance, she had the grace to blush. He was a fine-looking person, with more pride in his face than was perhaps pleasant, and no great air of frankness to temper it; at first sight especially he gave the impression of being reserved, cold, and even austere, though less by nature than by habit. The old lord had the same expression exaggerated intensely: his

countenance was the sublime of mortal pride and assumption; his features were high and thin and full of wrinkles; his hair sparse, but white as silver, as also were his brows; while his eyes glowed with the dark fire and vivacity of his youth. There was an occasional nervous twitch about his mouth which was very painful. Some people who knew the circumstances of his early life, said that the old man was thinking of the widow's son whom he had killed in a duel when he did that. There were passages in the noble lord's history which would not bear a very critical investigation; but with this narrative they have no connection, therefore let them bide in obscurity.

To her son's left hand was Lady de Plessy, a woman of a very beautiful and gracious countenance, rather wan and weary, but with great expression of tenderness and sweetness in her eyes and mouth. Arthur had a strong look of her—much stronger than his eldest sister, Lady Frances Egerton, who, indeed, seemed, to judge by her features and general tone, a decided, high-couraged woman, full of pride and defiance. This lady

was not long in singling out Nora amongst the occupants of the rectory pew as something worthy of admiration; and fixing upon her half-turned face a bold and critical eye, gazed until she made an angry blush burn on the young girl's cheek. When her curiosity was satisfied, she leaned across to her brother, and whispered,—

"Is that Spanish-eyed girl your nymph of the brook?"

He moved his head affirmatively, and turned away.

Mr. Brooke had written a new sermon for this occasion, and though, perhaps, rather lengthy, it was a very excellent discourse, under which old Lord de Plessy slept like a cherub. The others of the family listened discreetly, only closing their eyes at intervals, and could therefore pronounce favourable judgment on the new rector; although the head of the house observed that their opinion had better be held in abeyance until they had heard him half a dozen times, as his should be; a caution which might possibly leave the minister's merits undecided until Doomsday. There was a curious ceremony observed at Ash-

burn Church when the service concluded, which Cyril insisted was a relic of barbarous feudal times. The moment the blessing was pronounced, Lord de Plessy rose up stiff and stately, and walked down the aisle, followed by his wife and children, everybody else keeping their seats until they passed out at the porch; when they were clear of the churchyard, the rest of the congregation began to disperse, and not before.

Anna looked down the path to the gate into the road, but saw no footmarks on the sodden gravel; John Hartwell had not come.

"It was very unlikely that he would," said she to herself in a rather downhearted way as she went in; "it was too absurd of me to expect him."

Decidedly it was; for it was an even downpour of rain, and had been all the morning. In the evening she comforted herself greatly by inditing a little tender letter of expectations and regrets and disappointments, with a strong plea at the close for an answer, and an exhortation not to fail of his visit the next Sunday; to come even on Saturday, after office-hours, if he

could, and stay two nights instead of one. Anna was far more expansive and open-hearted to John than she was to her own family, but then she loved him more; and with writing this pretty letter, the first Sunday at Ashburn came to a less dreary close than Nora expected.

XII.

Early in the second week, Anna and Nora returned the calls they had received; and immediately after Miss Popsy Parker issued invitations for an evening party, according to her amiable promise. Ashburn would have been astonished if it could have penetrated into the secrets of the private asylum on the morning of that important day. It would have seen Mr. Joshua, with his mouth full of pins, detaching the holland covers from the drawing-room furniture, taking the piano legs out of their garments, and lifting and shifting everything, under the extremely vivacious superintendence of his clever sister; it would have seen Miss Popsy herself, in a short morning-

gown and slippers, with a silk handkerchief tied over her ears, washing with her own fair hands the ornamental and useful china with which her guests' eyes were to be refreshed; it would have seen her overlooking (but not daring to speak to) the professed cook, who was getting up an elegant yet substantial supper,—for Miss Popsy abominated from the depths of her hospitable soul the modern invention of "tea and turn out;" it would have seen and heard her expostulate over and over again in a striking manner with Joshua, who was at once the most willing and the most incapable of domestic helps; and it would have seen her, finally, lie down for half an hour's nap, in that short gown, those slippers, and that Indian head-tire, on the best amber-damask couch in the drawing-room;—it would have seen all this, if it had been able to see through solid wall, but not without; for the blinds were down and the front-door locked, as a signal that Miss Popsy Parker was not at home to company.

By seven o'clock in the evening, the scene underwent a change. A bright fire blazed in the polished grate, and Mr. Joshua and Miss

Popsy sat in state on either side of it, scarcely daring to speak, lest they should blow something out of its exact place. Miss Popsy's attire was of the richest and gayest fashion,—an amethyst satin dress, profusely trimmed with white blonde, and more gold chains than anybody else in the neighbourhood ever wore; for besides her own and Joshua's, she had on her late mother's and grandmother's. A turban-shaped cap with little white feathers topped these splendours; and Miss Popsy's own eyes twinkled like stars beneath the nodding clouds. Joshua was dreadfully stiff: his coat, his boots, his everythings were new, and all shining to that extent, that he could see minute reflections of himself in the knobs of the fire-irons, the arms of the sofa, and the white marble of the chimney-piece, besides in his own boot-toes. His hair had yielded to much persuasion, and took obstinate curves sideways, instead of sticking straight up—a novel fashion, which excited Miss Popsy's sarcasm.

"Eh, Joshua, you are curled like Hyperion," said she. "Which Miss Brooke are you going to captivate to-night? I would try for the scorn-

ful young beauty, if I were you. 'Faint heart'—you remember the rest."

"Is not Charley Wilde coming?" asked Mr. Joshua, passing his fingers hastily through one side of his hair, and destroying the balance of waves which he had been an hour in making.

"I see what you are at; you are going courting to the handsome private property. I wish you may get it; but you won't."

Mr. Joshua was meekly silent. He had cast longing glances in the direction of the Riverscroft demesnes for the last ten years; and he was of firm opinion that if his sister Popsy would but back his suit with her powerful influence, he should win the objects of his tender desires,—to wit, the farms, arable and pasture, the park, woods, and manorial rights, now to Miss Charley Wilde solely appertaining.

"You won't get it," continued Miss Popsy, "because Charley intends to lead a single life, the more sensible woman she. Don't put on that sentimental Billy-Lackaday look, Joshua, *don't.* You only want a petticoat to be Miss Mavis."

If the umbrella had been handy, Mr. Joshua's

knuckles would have suffered; but as Miss Popsy had no weapon but a costly Indian fan, which she feared to break, he escaped. Suddenly, while Miss Popsy was in the act of tip-toeing before the mirror to see that no part of her head-dress had been disarranged by wagging it mockingly at Joshua, a knock resounded through the house, and caused her to subside hastily on the couch.

"Sidney Wilfred; he is the first everywhere," remarked she; and accordingly Mr. Sidney Wilfred was announced.

He was a slight, boyish person, whiskerless, but long-haired and spectacled, and with the nervous fidgets in his arms and legs, which he never knew how to dispose of comfortably. He had two or three favourite attitudes, one of which he struck immediately upon entering Miss Popsy's drawing-room; this was a Napoleonic folding of the arms high on the chest, the feet crossed over each other, and the right foot resting on the toe. For the space of three minutes he contrived to maintain his graceful balance; and then he began to waver about on one leg, while the other, straying in an aimless manner, knocked the poker

from its position in the centre of the fender, and caused it to fall with a clatter on the tongs. At this instant Miss Mavis and Miss Scruple came in, the one as tawdry-fine and the other as homely and substantial as usual. Miss Mavis was lispingly cordial to the host and hostess, but the sunshine of her smiles was for Mr. Sidney Wilfred. She caused him to sit down beside her.

"Ah, such a sweet morning as I have had!" began Miss Mavis, in an enthusiastic whisper; "such an enjoyable morning!"

"What have you had? pray let us hear, Miss Mavis, if it is anything very charming. I love news, good news especially."

"'A feast of reason and a flow of soul,' I may well say, Miss Popsy. I have shed tears of pure delight over our gifted friend's new poem—his *Sighs of a Sorrowful Soul adrift on a Sea of Suffering.* The sublimity and profundity of his 'Sighs' are beyond plain language to express."

The poet sat chafing his hands vehemently, and blushing as if he had never been praised before; while Miss Scruple added,—

"Yes, they are profound, and in every respect

proper, natural, and judicious, which is more than can be said for all poetry."

"I have not heard any of these 'Sighs.' Perhaps Mr. Sidney would declaim a stanza or two for our edification," said Miss Popsy.

"*Do,* Sidney; they want but your voice and expression to give them a perfect vocal melody. It will be a rich treat," murmured his friend.

The young gentleman was really nervous and bashful; but after a little more persuasion, he gave vent to the following "Sigh," in the husky tremulous tone in which an imperfect Norval declaims his early history before the usher's desk:

"Drifting, unanchored, flung from wave to sky,
As the poor harried clown in blanket tossed
Sees all the world go round him in a swing,
So is my sad soul giddied with the woes
Which, holding the four corners of the Witney,
Do heave with power, and through the ambient air
Jerk it untimely; shrieking peal on peal
Of wild demoniac laughter as it turns and falls,—
As falls the well-browned pancake in the pan
When the quick culinary arm doth toss it up!
Oh, for an hour of rest, an hour of peace!
Or better still, an hour of sweet revenge!
Then would I lay my foes upon the rack
And tear them limb from limb!
Come hither, and be racked, ye selfish woes;
For I will bear your tossings nevermore!"

Just as the poet made this very unreasonable demand, the party from the rectory were announced, and almost immediately after Mr. and Mrs. and Miss Foxcroft, Captain Clayton and Mrs. Westford, Mr. Hardman and Mr. George Hardman, a Mr. and two Misses Worksop, and finally Miss Charley Wilde. Everybody had the outstretched hand of friendship for the last comer, who received their greetings in a frank manly way, and immediately procured an introduction to Anna and Nora. Miss Charley Wilde did not sacrifice much to the Graces in the way of dress; for her black satin robe was a compromise between a surtout and a monk's frock, girded round the waist with cord and tassels; her hair looked much as if she had employed Eolus as her tiring-woman, and engaged him to tear a few golden ears of barley out of the sheaves to stick amongst it.

"Do you ride?" was her first question to Nora, who was at once elected as her favourite for the evening.

Nora said no.

"But you ought to ride; you have just the

figure for horseback. I must have you out with me; I can give you a mount at any time. Have you made Sidney Wilfred's acquaintance? Sidney, come here, I want to speak to you." The young poet drew near. "I have read your 'Sighs,' sir, and written a critique upon them, in which I have endeavoured to fathom their bathos. Why don't you write sense? you have talent; and for misusing it you deserve to be tossed in that wonderful Witney you talk about. Sidney is my cousin, Miss Eleanora; and I scold him sometimes."

"Very severely, don't you, Miss Wilde?" whispered Miss Mavis, tenderly. "We should be lenient to the aspiring flights of genius. How can our small capacities rise to the line of their glorious flights? Take heart, my gifted friend; speak out your utterances from your soul-depths, and astound a wonder thunder-stricken world."

Uncle Ambrose's countenance, as he overheard this mock-sublime, was a picture of eloquent surprise; he could not withdraw his eyes from the interesting group of which his niece formed

one. Miss Mavis thought he was entranced by her silver flow of words, and went on,—

"Harsh, untunable indeed must be the mind that thrills not melancholy to the wild strain of your genius-inflated verse, Sidney Wilfred. You may not be appreciated *now;* but your dismal 'Sighs' will echo to the far-remote of time."

There was a quaver in this prophetic close which Miss Charley Wilde would have imitated had she dared.

Miss Mavis sighed herself a little nearer to uncle Ambrose, whose retreat was cut off by a barricade of little odd chairs and stools.

"Scotland is a very agreeable country, is it not?" said she, with a gentle significance, which was intended to establish them at once on the basis of intimate friendship; but which only startled and confounded uncle Ambrose, and made him blush. "I have never been so far north myself,—never farther than Yorkshire; but I have heard it is a delightful country, equally celebrated for its dainty cates and beautiful women."

A drop of the modest eyelids pointed the last words.

"Charming person in Scotland!" muttered uncle Ambrose, scarcely knowing what he said; and to his immense relief, Mr. Joshua Parker, hearing the word "Scotland," came and gave them conversational benefit of his experience during a pedestrian tour in that country some ten years before. Then Sidney Wilfred chimed in with the Border minstrelsy; and Charley Wilde with deer-stalking and grouse-shooting; until Miss Mavis quite lost the opportunity of bewildering uncle Ambrose with her lisp and multiform fascinations, and was obliged to be generally agreeable.

The tea was not handed round at Miss Popsy's party, as the present custom is: she knew all her company dined early; and being an enemy to genteel starvation, her table was spread with every delicacy which hungry people even could desire. She presided over the tray herself, and expected her guests to sit down and make a meal of their tea; and though Miss Mavis, after every such occasion, railed at the vulgar profusion, she nevertheless acquitted herself nobly, especially

with regard to a certain rich cake containing a ring and a sixpence, which was called "matrimony."

Tea may be made a very sociable gathering if people will; and everybody being in good-humour, the Brookes' impression of their new neighbours was decidedly agreeable. When it was over, the chat flowed pleasantly on; and the innocent amusements that Miss Popsy had provided for her guests gave entire satisfaction.

"In my young day we liked nothing better than a game of forfeits," said she; "but fashion has refined them out of vogue. Will some of you young folks give us a little music? and then we will have a round game at cards."

There was a demur as to who should take the lead, nobody liking to be put forward; till Mrs. Foxcroft, desirous that her daughter should be covered with glory, urged her eloquently, both with tongue and elbow, to do her little best.

"Come, Moppet, you have a pretty song, let us hear it," said she, in a bland accent of maternal encouragement. "Moppet has a pretty song, has she not, papa?"

Thus appealed to, the doctor broke off an argument on consubstantiation which he was holding with the rector, and bade his blushing child oblige the company. Moppet was accordingly led a sacrifice to the piano by Mr. Sidney Wilfred, who then retired behind the window-curtain to stop his ears until the pretty song was done. The young lady was not very perfect either in its instrumental or vocal part, so that the performance could not be regarded as very triumphant; but Charley Wilde coming after her, soon obliterated her discord by a well-sung song with a very sweet melody.

"Do give us the 'Laughing Chorus,' Miss Charley; it is a prime favourite of mine, and nobody can do it like you," said Mr. Joshua; and Charley, ever obliging, readily complied; and the various cachinnatory sounds it elicited resolved the last bit of ice in the room.

The table was then cleared for a round game; and Miss Popsy having secured for herself a seat beside Charley, and Miss Mavis being almost in uncle Ambrose's pocket, everybody was contented: some few—Mr. Hardman, Sidney Wil-

fred, and the rector—preferred the parts of onlookers, and sat out, but every other person would play.

"What shall it be?" asked Miss Popsy; "loo, red nines, vingt-un, or pounce commerce?"

Charley Wilde was very sporting, and gave her voice for unlimited loo; but the majority were for pounce commerce, so pounce commerce carried the night.

Miss Mavis again alluded confidentially to Scotland, and so confused uncle Ambrose that he could never acquire the rules of the game, and was for ever pouncing when he had no business to pounce, and being snapped at by Miss Popsy, and told what was right by Miss Scruple, to the mischievous Nora's undisguised pleasure. It is rather dreary to watch a large friendly group engaged in a round game of cards; the endless contradictions, blunders, and settings-right make the occupation sound more like quarrelling than a sociable reunion for pleasant purposes. Sidney Wilfred could not bear it long; and having at the first sight plunged hopelessly into love with young Nora Brooke, he now retired into a dusk and

remote corner to compose a sonnet to her maiden beauty. He accomplished two profound lines between then and supper-time, which wonderfully relieved his feelings.

"I pounce!" screamed Mr. Joshua, spreading his great hand abroad over a particular card, and opening his eyes eagerly.

"No, you don't, mind your turn!" cried Miss Popsy, hitting his fingers with one of the little trays full of fish; which were in consequence scattered over the table, and chiefly picked up in an absent fit by Miss Mavis, and added in the confusion to her own store.

"It is your deal, uncle Ambrose; Miss Scruple dealt last. There are the cards; make haste," said Nora.

"Shall I deal for you?" whispered Miss Mavis; and, raking up the stray cards of the pack with her claw-like fingers, she proceeded to do so, judging uncle Ambrose's mind to be so preoccupied with the charming person in Scotland as to make him quite incapable of dealing properly. But Miss Scruple raised the querulous voice of remonstrance,—

"It is not your deal, Matilda; it is Mr. Ambrose Brooke's. Why do you not let it go round properly?" said she.

"I never care for these games unless I may cheat; I always cheat at private parties if I have a chance," observed Captain Clayton. "I give everybody warning, therefore. This card mine? Very good card——"

"No, it is not yours; it is mine. Don't you see *that* one is before you, and *this* one before me?" said Miss Popsy, waspishly.

"Matilda, deal properly. You have no business to look at the cards, nor to show your hand to your neighbours."

Then there was an interval of silence, broken by uncle Ambrose asking Miss Mavis if he might pounce.

"No, not yet," replied she, with tenderness. "Show me what you have, and I'll pounce for you;" and accordingly, to the end of the game, she played and lost for him and herself too; reverting in whispers from time to time to the north, and its charming women, scenery, and songs. She also secured his arm to take her

in to supper, and, in short, victimized him to Nora's full content. As her lisp made her frequently unintelligible, he answered her insinuations and direct questions at cross-purposes for the most part.

Nora overheard, "Scotch music is delightful, is it not? Are you an amateur of its popular melodies?"

"Yes, agreeable woman, very; especially in her own house."

"Ah, you mean Miss Popsy; and you don't consider her shrewish?"

"Sweeter than I can express."

"Oh! I'm afraid you are a sad flatterer, naughty man. And you don't think her temper too vivacious?"

"I prefer a breezy climate: in Scotland for instance——"

"But are not the winds trying to the female complexion?"

"Lilies and roses bloom out of doors as early as——"

"You must pounce now. You want another card; there are only four of us left."

And at supper, after Miss Mavis had had two glasses of sherry, and become sentimental,—

"Youth, youth, it leaves us ere we know it is departing! Mr. Ambrose, yours was passed under an eastern sky; mine, in this cold unsympathizing England. Were you ever in Jersey?"

"Never; my tastes are for the north,—grouse-shooting on the moors in August."

"Tell me not so; some dearer tie is bound about your spirit: *love*, not *sport*, draws you away."

"Will you have a little of this lobster-salad, or some more tongue?"

"No more tongue, thank you; I have tongue enough. A custard, if you please. No, I'll change my mind, and have a strawberry-cream."

Sentiment notwithstanding, Miss Mavis had a capital appetite; and Sidney Wilfred, in an absent, spiritual way, ate more, and drank much more than could have been expected from a "soul adrift on a sea of suffering." Perhaps he had been adrift a long while, and had come back hungry and exceeding dry, as grief is said to be. It

rejoiced Miss Popsy's heart to see her friends eat, and she kept constantly admonishing them to take care of themselves and each other.

Nora, who sat between Captain Clayton and Sidney Wilfred, might otherwise have run the risk of being neglected; for both these gentlemen were very intent upon themselves. Mr. Joshua, who had by this time got over the stiffness and newness of his apparel, and had forgotten his curled hair, took wine all round with everybody, and drank healths, coupling them occasionally with very old-fashioned sentiments. He made a terrible bungle of one of them, which he converted into, "The married single, and the single happy," to his own intense confusion; for Miss Charley Wilde whispered that it was the most sensible speech she had ever heard from him, and she hoped he would never depart from it. Mr. Foxcroft proposed the health of the hostess, who acknowledged the compliment herself in a neat speech beginning, "Hold your tongue, Joshua; I am old enough to speak for myself, I hope," and ending with, "to our next merry meeting."

"What is your opinion on the pipe-clay ques-

tion, Captain Clayton?" tremulously said young Mr. Worksop, whose voice had never been heard until the close of supper. He was a shy, retiring person, who was getting himself up in politics.

"The pipe-clay question, sir? I never allow myself to have an opinion on professional topics. Our opinions are laid down for us; and what a soldier who knows his duty has to do is, to take them up and wear them as a part of his livery in the King's service."

Mr. Worksop subsided, and was heard no more, except in whispers to his sisters. Somebody—probably Miss Mavis—then started the more popular quarry of light literature, which all the elders conspired to run down; even Sidney Wilfred had his fling at it, as drawing modern taste into a false direction altogether.

"Where," said he, forcibly, "where are readers to be found to relish the honey-dew of Parnassus, when these tasteless streams of fiction have vitiated—have vitiated——"

He paused for lack of a strong conclusion; and Mr. Foxcroft took the words out of his mouth.

"Have vitiated the public mind. Where indeed, sir? I agree with you. Our old standards are being run aground and neglected for a gush of spasmodic twaddle! What do you think of our Chaucer, our glorious Will, our unsurpassable Milton? Are not they——"

"I confess, sir, that I do not think much of *them*: *we* moderns can support their rivalry," returned Mr. Sidney Wilfred, fixing his glass eyes on the doctor firmly, and planting his hands on the edge of the supper-table over which he leaned.

"Tennyson won't vail his bonnet to any of them, I dare say; but excuse an old-fashioned reader for leaning to the ancients."

"I do not propose the laureate as the representative of our age's genius—far from it, Mr. Foxcroft. There are other men whose power the century has not yet acknowledged; but——"

"Whose 'Sighs' shall echo to the far-remote of time," added uncle Ambrose, quoting Miss Mavis almost in spite of himself, and then blushing as deeply as the flattered poet himself.

Some of the company looked surprised; but all thought him in earnest, and of course no-

body could venture on a contradiction in the author's presence: so the huge compliment passed unchallenged.

"How good of you—how *very* good," whispered Miss Mavis, with enthusiasm. "What a treasure in an unenvious soul you have!"

But in Charley Wilde's estimation he sank at least a fathom.

Some young people there are who never appear to find their tongues until supper is over. Of this peculiar class were the two Misses Worksop, who, when they left the table, became quite giggling and expansive. The younger linked her arm into Anna Brooke's in the most confidential manner; and began to ask what was her opinion of things in general.

"Never mind me, you know; nobody ever does mind me. But what do you think of it all, now really?" said she, looking eagerly in Anna's puzzled face.

"It is all very pleasant," replied Anna, at hazard.

"No! Really now, do you think so? Look at Mrs. Westford, isn't she altogether charming? Listen, and I'll tell you something. Our Willy

is in love with her *really*, but it is quite a secret yet, so don't tell."

Anna promised not to misuse her confidence.

"I don't think he would care much if it *did* come to her ears; for he is so shy, he will never get her told himself. I say he will have to propose to her by proxy; but he can't marry her by proxy—it is only royal people and kings and queens that do that, you know."

Mrs. Westford was a comely widow of six-and-forty, and Mr. Worksop was a youth hovering on twenty, with immense ambition and a very small patrimony; the connection, therefore, looked very eligible to him, as she had a good dower and a nice house of her own. Often and often had the aspiring politician in his day-dreams exiled the poor old captain to remote marine lodgings, and installed himself as master at Ashburn Lodge, with the gentle widow as his wife. Futile dreams of youth and inexperience, never to be realized!

Charley Wilde was the first to take her departure, after exacting from Nora a promise to be at home to her on the morrow, when she proposed to call at the rectory.

"For," said she, "now that I have made your acquaintance, I long to teach you to ride. There is to be a stag-hunt next week with Lord de Plessy's hounds, and I mean to go out; I wish you could too."

Mr. Sidney Wilfred, who overheard this, turned away with a profound sigh.

"What ails you, Sidney, man?" asked his cousin. "Do you think I shall spoil my new friend? He compliments me with the name of 'Horse-godmother,' which is very rude," she added, turning to Nora. "And I see by his face he is going to honour you with a 'Sigh' of admiration in several stanzas. But don't be beguiled into vanity, for he has rhymed even on poor Moppet there, and almost broken her heart with his inconstancy. He says he cannot endure masculine women; but you will see that after he has paid his court to every point of the compass, he will end by marrying me. Now I am going; good-bye. Miss Mavis—my carriage is waiting—shall I have the pleasure of taking you to your door? She does not hear; well, never mind. Good-night, Miss Popsy; good-night, Mr. Joshua.

One of the rectory gentlemen will perhaps give Miss Mavis an arm home;" and Charley Wilde disappeared, talking fluently all the way downstairs, and into her carriage, when she found nobody was there to listen.

When she was gone, other people began to go too; and uncle Ambrose was compelled to offer Miss Mavis his escort to her cottage door; for she said she was afraid there might be some men about, and she did not consider it safe for a female to go home unprotected.

"I must compliment you on your triumphant conquest, uncle Ambrose," cried the mischievous Nora, as he entered the rectory-parlour after conducting Miss Mavis home. "I am sure she sets the charming person in Scotland at nought now, and thinks to supplants her."

"And your poetical figure of speech at supper —you did indeed come out surprisingly," added Mr. Brooke. "The young genius will certainly affix your name to the dedication-page of his next poem as an enlightened appreciator of talent."

Uncle Ambrose lighted his candle and stalked

off to bed, without condescending to answer their gibes.

XIII.

The day after Miss Popsy Parker's entertainment, as Nora was stretching up her pretty arms to reach a certain spray of China roses for the replenishment of her favourite vase, and standing on tiptoe to attain her object, upon which she was very intent, the rectory garden was entered by Lady de Plessy, Lady Frances Egerton, and the Honourable Arthur. Nora did not perceive them, and went on striving for the roses, till, having caught the branch, and brought it down nearly low enough for her fingers to break off, it suddenly jerked back to the wall, leaving a thorn in her rosy palm. With an impatient little exclamation, she turned round and confronted the visitors, at sight of whom she blushed deeply.

"What a lovely creature!" said Lady Frances in a whisper to her brother. "Get those roses for her, Arthur."

Arthur instantly obeyed, and presented them with a gallant bow.

"Will you come in?" said Nora, shyly, and she led the way to the drawing-room, where Anna and uncle Ambrose were sitting. Mr. Brooke was out somewhere in the village, and Cyril was fishing in the beck.

The introduction was very unceremonious, but for that all the more pleasant. Lady de Plessy talked about parish topics to Anna; uncle Ambrose and Arthur got on the theme of Indian affairs; and Lady Frances talked to Nora about flowers, pet birds, and other innocent little subjects that she thought the young girl would understand. Nora was not a little confused by the long and earnest gaze that Lady Frances fixed on her face; and yet she could not be annoyed at it, for so much frank good-nature mingled in her *brusquerie*. Something led them to speak of London and Mr. Brooke's curacy there, and the tears of joyful emotion came into Nora's eyes as she expressed how happy they had been made by Lord de Plessy's benevolence.

"You sweet little enthusiast!" exclaimed Lady Frances, "my father did not count on such romantic gratitude. If you thank him in that

way yourself, you will charm him into being your humble adorer for life."

Nora thought Lady Frances was laughing at her; this strain was quite new to her, and she grew rather shyer and more reserved.

"It is beautiful to witness a genuine feeling of happiness. My dear, you are refreshing to me, and I must know you better. I am an old woman, so you must not be offended at what I say. Arthur, come here one moment."

The young man approached.

"Look at this child and tell me whom she is like. I seem to know her face."

Arthur de Plessy changed countenance.

"She reminds you of Dr. Lee's daughter, Frances." He could not bring his lips to say carelessly, "Grace Lee."

"My God! so she does," replied Lady Frances in an under-tone, and with a glance at her brother, who returned to his discussion with uncle Ambrose. An appearance of preoccupation seemed to take her all at once, and she continued silent for several minutes.

"Strange coincidence!" she said, half to her-

self, and then asked Nora if she happened to have any relatives of the name of Lee.

"No, I am not aware of any;" and the subject passed.

"My dear, you like birds and flowers; we have plenty of both at Plessy Regis. You must come to luncheon, and I will show you them: the aviary is my especial care."

Lady de Plessy overheard the invitation, and looked round. Something in Nora's attitude and expression of countenance struck her forcibly; and, lifting her eyes to observe Arthur, she saw that he also was watching with absorbed interest the bright young beauty.

"Mr. Brooke will perhaps spare her to us for a few days, Frances," added she, courteously. "My dear, would you like to come to Plessy Regis? We are quite homely people, like yourselves, and will take care of you."

Nora looked delighted, but hesitated.

"You shall come when Charley Wilde is with us next week," said Lady Frances, attributing the girl's shyness to ignorance of themselves and their ways. Mr. Brooke came in before they

left, and gave his consent. It seemed natural that everybody should at once attach themselves to Nora, she was so sweetly attractive and innocent.

She went to Plessy Regis at the time fixed, and enjoyed her visit exceedingly. Lady de Plessy was as kind to her as a mother could have been, and Lady Frances made quite a pet of her; but she liked most of all the short half-hour before dressing for dinner which was spent in the schoolroom in the twilight. Arthur commonly came in then; and though he never talked to her much at any time, his manner towards her was full of such a courteous deference, that she almost regretted having to go back home at the end of four days, and thought more of his grave dark face than was at all good for her afterwards. After this visit, Arthur de Plessy often strolled down by the beck, with his rod and line, on pretence of fishing; but after a short talk with Cyril or uncle Ambrose, he generally ended by going into the rectory-garden, and talking through the open window to the two girls at their work. Sometimes he came alone, and sometimes Lady

Frances was with him, or his mother; but any way he contrived to talk most to Nora. She was one time lively and quaint, and another shy and proud; but she was always beautiful and always attractive. The natural results followed; Arthur de Plessy fell in love most indiscreetly, and it is possible that, without a word being exchanged on either side, she knew it and returned it.

Not seldom did his thoughts at first revert to the grave in Riverscroft churchyard; but the heart of man is not constituted to grieve for ever, a discovery which Arthur presently made to his great comfort. I cannot say what led to the confidence, but one morning in the garden he told Nora about Grace Lee,—how they had loved each other as children almost, how they had been separated, and she had died in his absence. Nora's pitiful eyes looked lovelier through their tears than ever, and I believe it was on this occasion that each got a silent glimpse into the other's heart. Arthur was rather shocked at what, in him, so plainly bore the guise of inconstancy; but he did not stay away from the rectory in con-

sequence. Lady de Plessy began to see in Nora the magnet that retained her son so quietly at Plessy-Regis; and made up her mind, if need were, gracefully to sacrifice her prejudices and pride of class, and keep Arthur at home by permitting him to contract an unambitious marriage. As for other people, they never could have conceived so wild a speculation as that the simple daughter of a country rector should fascinate the heir to an earldom, and nobody troubled themselves with an anxiety or a jealousy on the subject. Besides, there was a certain Lady Carry Stafford with an immense fortune and an unimpeachable pedigree, to whom it was pretty generally known that Lord de Plessy desired to see his son united. But Lady Carry was little, crooked, and sallow, besides being foolish and ill-tempered; and as, in most cases, a man marries a wife for himself, and not for his family, Arthur doubtless preferred the blithe and blooming Nora to the other lady, whom Miss Popsy Parker designated, in her choice and familiar phraseology, "the crookedest stick in all the wood."

I incline to think myself that if Arthur de

Plessy had not met opportunely with Nora Brooke racing down Larkhill, he would have gone back to India, leaving his heart buried in Riverscroft churchyard; have left his family in dudgeon; and have himself become in process of time a distinguished officer, or perhaps another unit in the long list of War's glorious army of martyrs.

XIV.

Another Sunday passed, a fine Sunday, and John Hartwell did not come, neither did Anna receive any news from him; and a letter that she had written to Louy remained unanswered. The poor girl grew every day more white and anxious as each post renewed her disappointment; and one morning, she and her father being down in the breakfast-parlour earlier than the rest, she asked him when he intended driving into town. Not before the end of next week, he told her; but catching the expression of patient pain on her countenance, he inquired if she had any particular reason for desiring to go earlier, because, if so, he had nothing to prevent him going that day.

"Well, if you will, papa," replied she, without assigning any cause for her vehement desire to go; but Mr. Brooke was at no loss to interpret it. Nora laughed at her sister's anxiety to get back into smoky London; and averred that if Anna could have had her own way, she would never have left it, even for this charming Ashburn.

After breakfast Josy and the chaise-cart came to the door, and Mr. Brooke and Anna started immediately. It was a very silent drive; for the poor girl was oppressed with a crowd of dark presentiments of which she could not divest herself. Arrived in town, Anna got into a Hampstead omnibus; while her father, after appointing to meet her at a certain hour at their old friend Mr. Parkes's, went about on his own business. Anna reached the Hartwells' house at noon; and on ringing at the door was admitted by the butler, who wore a face of lugubrious woe. Instead of showing her to the drawing-room at once, he asked her to wait in the study, which was empty, until he inquired if his mistress could see her. Anna passed a wretched five minutes until he

returned, and said she was to follow him. Louy rushed forward to meet her at the door, crying passionately, and drew her into the room, where Mr. and Mrs. Hartwell, her sister, and Mrs. Arthur, were all assembled. Mr. Hartwell looked aged by ten years since she saw him last; and his wife sat literally stupid and overwhelmed with grief, the great tears rolling down her face, and her blue lips quivering incessantly. Mrs. Arthur even showed unaffected signs of trouble; and Sophia was moving about in an aimless way, with swollen eyes and colourless cheeks, which testified to the bitterness of her sorrow.

"What does it all mean?" asked Anna, glancing from one to the other, while every trace of life left her face.

"My dear," said the old father, keeping her hand in his, and stroking it unconsciously while he spoke, "John has left us this morning."

"He has disgraced us all!" broke in Louy, impetuously. "He was what we cared for most in the world, and he has covered us with shame. I wish he had never been born!" And she flung herself down on the couch, and hid her face in

the pillows, while her whole frame shook with her violent sobbing. Anna stood speechless.

"John is gone abroad," said Mrs. Arthur; "and we are all in very great trouble; he has behaved so ill."

"Now, don't *you* blame him, aunt," exclaimed Louy, sitting up, and throwing back her hair from her burning face; "there will be plenty of people to do that without us. I mean to go to him; yes, mother, I do."

"Not with my leave, Louy," said her father; "and don't speak in that way to your mother,—don't you see how ill she is?"

Louy rocked herself to and fro, moaning painfully. Mrs. Arthur tried to speak of John again, but she would not let her.

"I'll tell you all there is to know, Anna, by and by; it is amongst ourselves, remember."

"Yes, my dear, quite amongst ourselves; there will be no horrid trial to get into the papers, because the matter has been arranged," persisted her aunt.

The old father rose up with a groan; and, resting his arm again the mantel-shelf, hid his face

upon it, crying like a child. Anna could do nothing in all this misery; she sat down by the window, and nobody took any notice of her for some time. Mrs. Arthur was busy with her sister-in-law, who had lost all self-restraint at the sound of her husband's groans, and was become hysterical. At length Louy came up to her, and whispered,—

"Come into the study with me, Anna; I can't bear this;" and they left the drawing-room together.

When they were alone, Louy said, with some bitterness,—

"You have had a lucky escape, Anna; there's no frightful disgrace such as the world never forgets, attached to *your* name. I need not put what John has done into so many words; I daresay you can guess?"

"Yes——"

"And what aunt Arthur said is true—there will be no exposure; but *we* know about it. Oh, Anna, sometimes I fancy it must be all a dream."

"He went away this morning?"

"You must have crossed on the road; I

am glad you were too late to see him—are you?"

Anna said, "Yes."

"He was miserably dejected. Oh, the fool he has been! I don't think my father will ever get over it!"

Anna looked as if she would like to hear more details; and Louy, with hesitation, gave a little further explanation. "You know, he was in a position of trust," said she. "Well, he appropriated some money that passed through his hands, intending to replace it. He never could do so; and at last he confessed to the head of the firm, who was always a friend of ours; he had been a schoolfellow of papa's. So he sent for papa, and they arranged that the money should be paid back as a loan, and that John should leave. That is a week since,—such a week!—and now he is gone."

"Where to?" asked Anna, in a choking voice.

"To France. My mother would not have him get farther out of the way. Oh, Anna, isn't it wretched?" And she began to weep again as uncontrolledly as ever.

Anna was so stunned that she seemed quite

apathetic. Only in the pallid hue of her lips and the restless glitter of her eyes, could it be seen how keenly the blow to her love struck home.

She was glad when the hour came for her to rejoin her father; but no explanation was needed by him; he had already heard of John's misconduct from Mr. Parkes. Ill news travels fast and travels far, and that of young Hartwell's journey abroad, and the causes that led to it, were strongly surmised, if not certainly known, in the whole circle of his friends and acquaintance.

On the morrow Anna and her father returned to Ashburn.

As the days wore slowly away, she also wore through the phases of her great trouble, and came forth from it but little changed externally, though her spirit was oldened by many a year. Neither Cyril nor Nora ever knew the cause of separation between their sister and John Hartwell; though Nora perhaps guessed that it was something sad and disgraceful, because some months later, when speaking casually of the Hartwells, her father told her briefly that the whole family had emigrated to Australia.

XV.

Lord de Plessy was a man not unpopular in his county, except with poachers, whom he prosecuted venomously; he was an easy landlord, a liberal master, and a munificent friend, from motives which cannot be impugned. His position, he was in the habit of saying, demanded it of him; and he worshipped his position as the outward sign of his inward dignity. But what gave him a more extensive popularity than anything else was a ball at Christmas, to which were invited all the small gentry and professional people for miles round in shoals. It must be admitted that his personal hauteur and assumption were never more conspicuous than on these occasions; but people gladly took him at his own valuation, and rather liked being loftily patronized than otherwise.

The Brookes received an invitation from Lady de Plessy in person; and to Nora's great delight, it was accepted by all but Anna, who gave some valid reason for preferring to remain at home. This ball was a very critical event,—more critical

than even Nora imagined perhaps, though her restless fancy never ceased to dwell upon its possibilities. Plessy Regis was always filled with staying company, principally gentlemen, on this occasion; and one morning the conversation turning on the beauty of the maids of Kent, which somebody asserted was proverbial, Lady Frances Egerton spoke and said, "We can show no beauty comparable to the rector of Ashburn's daughter —Nora Brooke; she would grace a coronet, would she not, Arthur?"

Arthur was reading, and did not reply; but his brow contracted impatiently at what seemed to him a profane discussion of a name that he held sacred. Sidney Wilfred began to lisp her praises in very high-flown language, which irritated him to such an extent that he would have liked to lift the poet by the nape of the neck and put him out of the window. Instead, however, of indulging this laudable sensation, he shut his book, and went into the park to take counsel with himself concerning Nora. Lady Carry Stafford, who was sentimental when she thought it becoming, contrived to meet him near Lark-

hill plantations; but he was not in a gracious humour, and would not turn to walk back with her, as she half invited him to do; so she went home and cried for spite.

Arthur de Plessy had undergone and recovered from the wounds received in one sharp tussle with fortune, and his present attachment seemed very likely to invite another. That his father would approve such a marriage as he contemplated was improbable; but having debated all the pros and cons, Arthur came round to the idea from which he started, namely, that his right was to consult his happiness and Nora's before any other person's in this matter; so he came to the resolution to put his fate to the test at the first opportunity; and if she—which he did not doubt—would accept him, to follow his own man's will and make her his wife, in spite of every consideration of personal aggrandizement.

Not only at the rectory was the Christmas ball looked forward to with palpitations of hope and anxiety; consultations were held every day in Miss Mavis's parlour between that lady and Miss Scruple as to what they should wear on

the great occasion; and the former having extracted from her young friend Nora Brooke that uncle Ambrose's favourite colours were yellow and red, revivified an amber poplin dress with scarlet poppies, and came out perfectly dazzling. She was the most strikingly conspicuous figure at the ball, not even excepting Nora, who looked a very queen of youth and beauty in her white muslin dress and simple braided hair, on which she had good taste enough to put no ornament whatever. But she carried a bouquet of magnificent camellias; and as they had no camellias at the rectory, the supposition is, that they were sent from the Plessy-Regis conservatories.

The child was so eager to go that she hurried everybody to get dressed quickly and early, yet kept them waiting full half an hour, though she was quite ready, while she told Anna something that made her spend a very thoughtful hour over the fire by herself after her father, uncle Ambrose, Cyril, and her sister were gone. Still, however, they arrived in good time; only Miss Popsy Parker and her brother were before them; and Miss Popsy was availing herself of the eligible

opportunity to unbosom herself touching the game laws to Lord de Plessy, who listened with superlative amiability and contempt to what he regarded as a very deplorable mental aberration.

Miss Popsy had on a red velvet gown, all her gold chains, and a new bird-of-paradise turban; Charley Wilde was in black lace; and Lady Carry Stafford in primrose, which made her sallower than ever. When the hall was filled, it looked like a gay conservatory, with flowers of every season in full bloom together.

The musicians were stationed in a temporary orchestra at one end of the hall, where the dancing was to be; and at a given signal they commenced. Nora was standing quietly near Lady de Plessy, when Arthur came up and claimed her for the first set. She blushed beautifully: such a distinction was the envy of half the room; and nobody could gainsay her claim as the belle, which was supposed to have drawn it upon her. Lady Clara Stafford fanned herself vehemently, and Lord de Plessy looked extremely fidgety. He had always been a con-

noisseur in feminine loveliness, and he now mentally acknowledged that Nora Brooke would bear a comparison with the most famous toasts of his youth. Then he glanced at Lady Carry, and made a wry mouth, as if he were tasting something bitter.

"Come, and let me present you to my father, Nora," said Arthur de Plessy when the dance was finished. There had been a few whispered words of explanation between them in the course of it by one of the pillars of the gallery. Nora's heart palpitated fast; and she gave a little fearful glance at the old lord, who was watching them keenly. Arthur understood her, and added, "Well, then, to my mother first;" though he himself felt bold to dare any amount of paternal wrath. Perhaps he had a politic view in desiring to get the announcement over while his father was in a genial mood, and also so surrounded by observers that he would be compelled to receive it with seemly quietness at least.

Lady de Plessy was seated by one of the fireplaces in a tall carved chair, watching the dancers

and conversing at intervals with Charley Wilde, who was lounging on an ottoman near her. As Arthur approached with Nora on his arm, Charley opened her eyes wide, gasped in the middle of a witty observation, and seemed suddenly bewildered with a flood of enlightenment. She fell a little farther back, and concentrated her attention on Miss Mavis's florid gown; while Lady de Plessy, conscious that the crisis was come, turned pale and flushed by turns.

"Mother, will you welcome a new daughter?" said Arthur, taking her hand and laying it upon Nora's. Lady de Plessy smiled tremulously; and as the young girl leant down towards her, she clasped her slight fingers very close, but could scarcely speak. At length she said, with constraint,—

"You will stay at home now, my son? You must keep him in England, my love."

Arthur, with a proud, pleased air, lifted up his head and glanced across to his father, who was talking nervously to Lady Carry Stafford, and taking serious note of the little pantomime that was enacting by the fireplace. He was not

the only person who understood it. Sidney Wilfred chose to fancy himself the sport of evil fate, and went distracted in a recess behind the evergreens; he hit his forehead twice against the palm of his hand, and then was immediately fired with poetical inspiration, which vented itself in a most agonizing "Sigh," that appeared in a second edition of his poems as an "Address to my Soul's sweet Pains." From his retreat amongst the holly, he saw Arthur de Plessy draw Nora's hand through his arm, and then lead her towards his father, who, seeing his purpose, abandoned Lady Carry, and came to meet him.

"What, in the name of all that is wonderful, am I to understand by this, sir?" said the old man, in a hissing whisper, and with a glance that intimated his desire to defer explanation for the present.

Nora heard the ominous tone, but she did not see the basilisk eyes upon her face, for she was steadily contemplating the point of her shoe. Arthur was, however, strung up with resolution and excitement, and did not choose to intimate

that he understood his father's wishes. He said quietly,—

"Sir, my mother has accepted Nora as another child; you must accord me the like grace."

Lord de Plessy was for a moment so aghast at Arthur's audacity that he did not answer a word; but when Nora lifted her beautiful eyes to his with a sweet pleading expression, that was irresistible, he said,—

"Well, if Arthur *will* make a fool of himself, he has a very fair excuse;" then instantly becoming sensible of the ludicrous discourtesy of this speech, he took her hand, and tried to mend it confusedly by saying, "We will make the best of it; but I thought Arthur had more—" whether *sense* or *pride* he did not communicate, for he was seized with a most opportune fit of coughing, which prevented him from uttering for several minutes; and when he wiped his eyes after it and looked round, neither his son nor Nora was visible. The great picture-gallery opened from the hall; and this being lighted and thrown open as a promenade between the dances, they had strolled in there to talk a little by themselves.

Uncle Ambrose and Mr. Brooke, meeting them, spoilt this intention, but enabled Arthur to propose a question to the father, which received a conditional affirmative. Soon after, as Lord de Plessy was seen arm-in-arm with the rector in amicable conversation, the lovers rightly imagined that they had no great obstacles to expect.

Presently Charley Wilde came in and swept them a mock curtsey.

"I have been seeking you for ten minutes, Arthur," said she; "I hope I am the first to proffer my congratulations? Don't look contradictory, but give Nora to me, and go and dance with somebody else, or you will lose your election when it comes on. You are not to rebel; Lady de Plessy sent me."

Arthur chose to take Nora to a seat by his mother himself; and then he went and did his duty like a man, dancing alternately with Moppet, Miss Mavis, Miss Popsy Parker (she was a very important person on account of her powers of speech), and any other lady who seemed less in request as a partner than the generality.

Nora was very happy. Lady de Plessy and Lady Frances Egerton talked to her so kindly and encouragingly, and seemed really thankful to her for having arrested so signally the erratic fancies of Arthur; and even the old lord, when he reflected on the age and temper of his son, was disposed to contemplate her with favour.

At this Christmas ball awkward and troublesome ceremonies of precedence were waived, and each person took in whom he preferred to the supper in the great dining-room, which was hung round with generations of De Plessys in their habits as they had lived. Lord de Plessy, oddly enough, and to his son's discomfiture, took Nora, and left him with Miss Mavis on his hands. This lady had had many opportunities of ingratiating herself with uncle Ambrose; though she displayed so little tact in the use of them, that he took Miss Popsy Parker to supper instead, and thought seriously of proposing to that lady, as a shield of defence against the other; but her remarkable appetite for cold turkey, tarts, custards, trifle, sherry, and champagne, determined

him to give the matter a little more serious reflection, which finally resulted in his *not* proposing, but only becoming more Scotch than ever in his tastes and conversation.

Encouraged by a little gentle raillery from Charley Wilde, Mr. Joshua Parker proposed to that lady before supper, and was rejected; after supper, flushed with wine and game-pie, he proposed to Moppet, and was accepted. It is said that Miss Popsy beat him with her fan for his folly all the way as they drove home; but he married Moppet in spring, and his sister now has the private asylum to herself.

That Christmas ball materially changed the aspect of Ashburn society. Nobody patronized the Brookes any more; but everybody courted them. Poor Miss Mavis made one very unlucky speech; she said to Nora—having observed how much she was made of by the Plessy-Regis family,—"You pretty thing, play your cards well, and I should not be surprised at *whatever* happened;" and she cried with mortification when she found out that she was addressing the affianced wife of Arthur de Plessy.

The marriage took place in February; and the next Christmas ball was even more glorious than the last, for it celebrated the birth of a son and heir to Arthur and his wife. The old lord considers his daughter-in-law the cleverest and best of women; and all the family acknowledge that it is better, after all, than if Arthur had married Lady Carry and been miserable, as he certainly would have been.

There has recently been a talk in Ashburn about Anna Brooke and the new rector of Riverscroft, but it is not verified sufficiently to be regarded as a fact. I incline to think myself that she will stay at Ashburn with her father and uncle Ambrose, especially since Cyril is away to the military college; but neither would I assume *that* as a certainty, for the rector of Riverscroft is a very agreeable and persevering man, and Anna is quite cheerful and happy again.

Louy Hartwell wrote to her once that she and John were settled on a sheep-farm in New Zealand; and that they were likely to do well now they were out of the reach of temptation. And since that letter she has seen in a paper sent

to her by some other member of the family,—possibly Mrs. Arthur,—that John is married.

Altogether it is probable, though not *certain*, that Ashburn church bells may ring in another marriage-morning ere long.

From the Diary.

Crofton, July 9.

YESTERDAY we came down here in a body; Felix, Emmy, the young ones, Harry, his wife and baby, and Mr. Dover. Miss Mostyn's wedding passed over with quiet cheerfulness, and then away we all ran for a fortnight's peace and quietness.

Emmy's marriage is to take place before Steenie goes back to school, and will therefore be rather earlier than we at first proposed; the 2nd or 3rd of August probably.

The children have never been to Crofton before, and this morning nothing would satisfy them but walking off to the cottage where Felix lived when he was the curate here—the present curate lives there now.

My grandmother's house has been turned into

lodgings, and, to my great satisfaction, we are actually in possession of it at this moment. The garden is as pretty and shady as ever; Felix and I have said to each other twenty times and more since we arrived, "Do you remember?" I think I remember everything! There are the acacia-trees to this day, and the sunshine shimmering through them on the grass exactly as I saw it once upon a time; I *thought* I was perfectly happy *then*, but I *know* that I am happier *now*.

My grandmother's woman, Sharpe, keeps the post-office, and I cannot see that her visage or her manners are in the slightest degree ameliorated; she snapped at me to-day when I went for stamps, and informed me that the rules did not oblige her to sell me more than three for the letters I had brought.

Dean Pompe and his family are here just now, and we have exchanged visits. The Dean grows very infirm, but Mrs. Pompe is as loud and magnificent as ever. Miss Pompe is very much changed; she looks old and anxious, but she does

a great deal of good in her way, which is practically benevolent. She has lately been staying on a visit with my aunt Amelia in Devonshire, and she says she wears admirably, and is so happy that it is a pleasure to be in the same house with her.

We take our ease here in the most delightful way; making excursions hither and thither "by boat and by donkey," as Belle says. We have been to Bishopswood, and over the moors to Loughborough, and the weather is resplendent every day. We all feel sorry our time must be so short, but it is necessary to be home again at least a week before the wedding.

Steenie has made acquaintance with the preventive service officers on the beach, and after hearing their wild tales of smugglers and "runs," he fancies he should like to be a coastguard's-man. Poor Steenie, how fickle his fancy is!

Belle contrived a few days ago to tear her shore-going Carmelite dress so ruinously that I bought her a suit of tough brown holland, such as I see

other children wearing, and sent for a dressmaker from Loughborough to sew it.

When the person came, she said she remembered me at Crofton as a girl, but I could not recollect her at all. While I was speaking with her our landlady entered, and asked after her sister who had been blind and had undergone an operation which was entirely successful. Belle was present also, and what we heard excited our interest so much that we inquired further, and Miss Price told us the story of her blind sister with a grave simplicity that was very pleasing.

MY BLIND SISTER.

I.

This was how I found it out. Lettie and I were sitting in the window at our work—it was some mourning we were making for our rector's family—and it had to be sent home the next day early. She said,—

"Jane, it seems as if the sun had given up shining; how dull everything looks! don't you think so?"

I did not notice it; there was still an hour's daylight. She put up her hand to her forehead as if it pained her, so I bade her go out for a turn in the garden; we had sat close to our sewing all the day, and the young thing was tired: even I was, and my eyes ached wearily. She went along by the flower-bed, and gathered a

few roses—we were in the middle of July then—and gave them to me through the window, saying that she would go down into the town for some trimmings we wanted to finish the dresses. I would rather she had stayed at home, and replied that the shops would be shut; but she was not listening, and went away down the path as I spoke. It was dusk when she came back; I had just shut the window, and was lighting my candle; she said, "I could not get the fringe, Jane," and then laying her bonnet on the dresser, took up her work. After she had sewed perhaps five minutes she dropped her hands on her knees, and such a strange, hopeless expression came into her face, that I was quite shocked and frightened.

"What ails you, Lettie? what can have happened?" I asked, suspecting I scarcely knew what.

She looked at me drearily in silence for some moments, and then said hastily,—

"I might as well tell you at once, Jane; I'm going blind."

My work fell to the ground, and I uttered a startled cry.

"Don't take on about it, Jane; it can't be helped," she added.

"It is only a fancy of yours, Lettie; I shall have you to Doctor Nash in the morning. What has made you take such a notion into your head all at once?" said I, for I thought this was another nervous whim. Lettie had been a good deal indulged by our mother before she died, and had shown herself not a little headstrong sometimes, as well as fanciful.

"It is of no use, Jane; I have been to Doctor Nash myself, and he said plainly that I was going blind. I have been to him twice before: I knew what was coming. Oh, Janey, what shall we do? what shall we do?" And having borne up thus far she broke down, and sobbed aloud, with her face on her arms on the table.

"We shall do very well. In the first place, I don't believe Doctor Nash knows anything about it; and, in the next, I shall have you up to London to a great doctor, and hear what he says before I give in to thinking that you are to be blind all your days."

She was a little cheered by this.

"To London, Janey! but where is the money to come from?" she asked.

"Leave that to me. I'll arrange somehow."

It was very puzzling to me to settle how just then, but I have a firm conviction that where there is a will to do anything, a way may generally be found, and I meant to find it.

She took up her work, but I bade her leave it.

"You will not set another stitch, Lettie," I said; "you may just play on the old piano and sing your bits of songs, and get out into the fresh air—you have been kept too close, and are pale to what you were. Go to bed now like a good little lassie; I'll do by myself."

"But there is so much to finish, Janey."

"Not a stitch that you'll touch, Lettie; so kiss me good-night, and get away."

"And you don't think much of what Doctor Nash said?" she asked, very wistfully.

"No! I've no opinion of him at all."

And hearing me speak up in my natural way (though my heart was doubting all the time), she went away comforted, and in better hope. I had put it off before her, because she would have

given way to fretting, if I had seemed to believe what the doctor said; but, as I drew my needle through and through my work till three hours past midnight, I had often to stop to wipe the tears from my eyes.

There were only two of us—Lettie and myself—and we had neither father nor mother, nor indeed any relatives whom we knew. Lettie was seventeen, and I was four years older. We were both dressmakers, and either worked at home or went out by the day. We lived in a small, thatched, three-roomed cottage outside the town, which had a nice garden in front. Some people had told us that if we moved into the town we should get better employ; but both Lettie and I liked the place where we had been born so much better than the closed-in streets, that we had never got changed, and were not wishful to. Our rent was not much, but we were rather put to it sometimes to get it made up by the day, for our landlady was very sharp upon her tenants, and if they were ever so little behindhand, she gave them notice directly.

I set my wits at work how to get the money

to take Lettie to London; but all that night no idea came to me, and the next day it was the same. With two pair of hands we had maintained ourselves decently; but how was it going to be now that there was only one! Rich folks little think how hard it is for many of us poor day-workers to live on our little earnings—much more to spare for an evil day.

II.

Sunday found me still undecided, but that was our holiday, and I meant to see Doctor Nash myself while Lettie was gone to chapel. She made herself very nice, for she had a modest pride in her looks which becomes a girl. I thought her very pretty myself, and so did the neighbours; she had clear, small features, and a pale colour in her cheeks, soft brown hair, and hazel eyes. It was not easy to see that anything ailed them, unless you looked into them very closely, and then there was a dimness to be seen about them, which might be disease. She had put off thinking about herself, and was as merry

as a cricket when she went down the lane in her white bonnet and clean muslin gown. She nodded to me (I was watching her from the doorway), and smiled quite happily. I was as proud of Lettie as ever my mother had been. She was always such a clever, warm-hearted little thing; for all her high temper.

When she was fairly gone, and the church bells ceased, I dressed myself in haste, and set off into the town to see Doctor Nash. He was at home, and his man showed me into the surgery, where I had to wait maybe an hour. When the doctor came in, he asked sharply why I could not have put off my visit till Monday; was my business so pressing? He did not consider how precious were the work-days to us, or maybe he would not have spoken so—for he was a benevolent man, as we had every reason to know; he having attended our mother through her last illness as carefully as if she had been a rich lady, though we could never hope to pay him. I explained what I had come about, and he softened then, but would not alter what he had told Lettie himself.

"She has been with me three or four times," he said. "She is an interesting little girl; it is a great pity, but I do not think her sight can be saved—I don't indeed, Jane."

He explained to me why he was of this opinion, and how the disease would advance, more lengthily than needs to be set down here. Then he said he could get her admitted into the Blind Institution if we liked; and that I must keep her well, and send her out of doors constantly. And so I went home again, with very little hope left, as you may well think, after what I had heard.

I did not tell Lettie where I had been, and she never suspected. There was no chapel that afternoon, and we were getting ready to take a walk along the river bank, as we generally did on fine Sundays (for all the town went there, and it freshened us up to see the holiday people far more than if we had stopped at home reading our books, as many say it is only right to do), when one of our neighbours came in with her son. Mrs. Crofts was a widow, and Harry was studying medicine with Dr. Nash. They were both kind friends of ours; and, between

Lettie and the young man, there had been for ever so long a sort of boy and girl liking; but I do not think they had spoken to each other yet. Lettie coloured up when Harry appeared, and went into the garden to show him, she said, the white moss-rose that was full of bloom by the kitchen window; but they stayed whispering over it so long, that I did not think it was only that they were talking about. Then Harry went out at the gate looking downcast and vexed, and Lettie came back into the house with a queer wild look in her face that I did not like. Mrs. Crofts said, "Is Harry gone?" and my sister made her a short answer, and went into the bedroom.

"Harry is going up to London very soon; I shall be glad to have the examinations over and him settled. Doctor Nash thinks very well of him; he is a good young fellow, Jane."

I replied that he had always been a favourite of mine, and I hoped he would do well; but, listening for Lettie's coming to us, perhaps I seemed rather cold and stiff; for Mrs. Crofts asked if I was not well, or if there was anything

on my mind; so I told her about poor Lettie's sight.

"I've seen no appearance of blindness; Harry never said a word. You don't think it can be true?" she asked.

I did not know what to think. I was sure that, in that whispering over the rose-tree, my sister had told young Mr. Crofts; and I wished his mother would go away, that I might comfort her. At last she went. Then I called to Lettie, who came at once. She had been fretting; but, as she tried to hide it, I made no remark, and we went down the lane to the river meadows in silence. The first person we met was Harry Crofts. Lettie seemed put out when he joined us, and turned back. She stayed behind, and was presently in company with our landlady, Mrs. Davis, who was taking the air in a little wheeled chair drawn by a footman. Mrs. Davis had always noticed Lettie. Harry Crofts looked back once or twice to see if she was following; but, when he found she was not, he proposed to wait for her, and we sat down by the water on a tree trunk which lay there.

"This is a sad thing about Lettie's eyes, Jane," he said, suddenly.

"Yes, it is. What do you think about them? Is there any chance for her?"

"Doctor Nash says not; but, Jane, next week Philipson, the best oculist in England, is coming to stay a couple of days with Nash. Let him see her."

"I meant to try to get her to London for advice."

"There is nobody so clever as Philipson. Oh! Jane, I wish I had passed——"

"Do you fancy you know what would cure her?"

"I'd try. You know, Jane, I love Lettie. I meant to ask her to be my wife. I did ask her this afternoon, and she said, No; and then told me about her sight—it is only that. I know she likes me: indeed, she did not try to deny it."

"Yes, Harry, you have been so much together; but there must be no talk of marrying."

"That is what she says."

"She is right—she must just stay with me. You could not do with a blind wife, Harry; you,

a young man, with your way to make in the world."

He tore up a handful of grass, and flung it upon the river, saying passionately, "Why, of all the girls in Dalston must this affliction fall on poor Lettie?" and then he got up and walked away to meet her coming along the bank. They had a good deal of talk together, which I did not listen to; for their young hearts were speaking to each other—telling their secrets. Lettie loved him: yes, certainly she loved him.

III.

Doctor Philipson's opinion was the same as that of Doctor Nash. Lettie was not so down-stricken as I had dreaded she would be, and she bade good-bye to Harry Crofts almost cheerfully when he went up to London.

"There, Jane, now I hope he'll forget me," she said to me; "I don't like to see him so dull."

That day Mrs. Davis sent her a ticket for a concert at the Blind Institution, and she went. When she came home to tea, she told me that

the girls and boys who sang looked quite happy and contented. "And why should I not be so too? what a number of beautiful sights I can remember which some of them never saw!" she added, with a sigh.

After this, imperceptibly, her sight went; until I noticed that, even in crossing the floor, she felt her way before her, with her hands out. Doctor Nash again offered to use his influence to get her admitted into the Institution, but she always pleaded, "Let me stay with you, Janey!" and I had not the heart to refuse; though she would have had more advantages there, than I could afford her.

Not far from us there lived an old German clockmaker, who was besides musical, and acted as organist at the Roman Catholic chapel in the town. We had known him all our lives. Lettie often carried him a posy from our garden, and his grandchildren came to me for patches to dress their dolls. Müller was a grim, fantastic-looking figure, but he had a heart of pure gold. He was benevolent, simple, kindly; it was his talk that had reconciled Lettie, more than any-

thing else, to her condition. He was so poor, yet so satisfied; so afflicted, yet unrepining.

"Learn music—I will teach thee," he said to my sister. So, sometimes in our little parlour, and sometimes in his, he gave her lessons in fine sacred pieces from Handel and Haydn, and taught her to sing as they sing in churches—which was grander than our simple Methodist hymns. It was a great delight to listen to her. It seemed as if she felt everything deeper in her heart, and expressed it better than before: and it was all her consolation to draw the sweet sounds up out of that well of feeling which love had sounded. I know that to remember how Harry loved her gave a tenderness and patience to her suffering which it would else have lacked. She, who used to be so quick with her tongue, never gave anybody a sharp word now.

I do not say much about our being poor, though, of course, that could not but be; still we had friends who were kind to us: even Mrs. Davis softened, and mentioned to me, under seal of confidence, that if I could not quite make up the rent, she would not press me; but I fortunately

had not to claim her forbearance, or else I do fear she could not have borne to lose a sixpence; and when it had come to the point we should have had to go like others: she was so very fond of money, poor woman! Lettie used to go to the Institution sometimes, where she learnt to knit, and net, and weave basket-work. Our rector—a better man never lived, or a kinder to the poor—had her to net covers for his fruit-trees, fishing-nets, and other things; and to knit woollen socks for himself and his boys, so that altogether she contrived to make what almost kept her. Now that the calamity had really come, it was not half so dreadful as it had seemed a long way off. Lettie was mostly cheerful. I never heard her complain, but she used to say often, that there was much to be thankful for with us. She had a quiet religious feeling, which kept her from melancholy; and, though I did not find it out until afterwards, a hope that perhaps her affliction might some day be removed. Harry had put that thought into her mind, and I do not think I am overstating the truth in saying that his honest, manly affection for her was the

great motive to his working so hard at his profession, in which he has since become deservedly successful and famous.

We had six very quiet years. It seemed to me as if Lettie had always, from the first, gone softly groping her way, and I had always led her to chapel and back. Harry studied in London; then we heard of him in Edinburgh; and at last his mother said he had gone to Paris; and she was half afraid he would settle there and marry a papist wife. Lettie looked sorrowful and restless for a day or two after that, but presently recovered her cheerfulness. We had not much change or variety at home. There was I for ever at my work, and Lettie at her music. She had gained a great deal of skill now; and many a time have I seen a knot of people standing at the corner of our garden hedge to listen to her singing. I have heard several grand public performers since then, but never one who could touch my heart and bring the tears into my eyes as my poor blind sister did.

On Sundays, at chapel, we could hear her voice, clear and sweet, above all the rest; and

though our tunes were wild and simple, sung by her, they were beautiful. Sometimes she would go to St. John's Church for the sake of the organ and the chaunting, but I did not feel it right to change: habit is strong in slow, untaught people; and it did not seem as if I had kept my Sabbath, unless I said my prayers in the homely little chapel to which our mother had led us by the hand when we were children.

Lettie loved the grand church music, and who could wonder at it, poor lassie? Once or twice when she begged me to go with her, it had seemed to fill my heart to pain almost; so how much more must it have excited her who was all fire and enthusiasm! She said it made her feel happier and better, and more thankful to God. Perhaps in losing one sense, her enjoyment through the others grew more intense.

IV.

At the end of these six years Harry Crofts came home. He was often at our house, and we liked having him; but, though Lettie seemed

happy enough, he was uneasy and discontented. I have seen him stand beside the piano, and never take his eyes off her by the half-hour together; but his face looked quite gloomy. At last he one day said to me, "Jane, are you timid—I do not think Lettie is? She seems strong and well." I knew he meant more than a simple inquiry after our nerves, and I asked if he thought he had found out a cure for my sister. He turned quite red.

"Yes; I believe I have. I saw an operation performed in Paris on a girl's eyes similarly affected. It was successful."

I said not a word. The prospect seemed too good, too beautiful to be true! Just at this minute, Lettie came in through the doorway; there was sunshine behind her, and she appeared to bring it into the parlour with her.

"Are you here, Harry?" she immediately asked.

It was a strange thing, that, although she neither saw him nor heard him speak, she was at once aware of his presence. He got up and took her by the hand, and brought her to me.

"Tell her, Jane, or shall I?" he whispered.

I signed to him to speak himself, which he did without hesitation.

"Lettie, have you courage to undergo an operation on your eyes which may restore your sight?"

She clasped her hands, and such a beautiful colour came flushing up into her face—you would have said it was like an angel's face, it changed so brightly.

"Oh, yes! anything, anything, Harry, only give me that hope!" said she, softly.

I looked at him questioningly, to ask if he had not better warn her of possible disappointment, and he said at once,—

"Lettie, I ought to tell you that this operation may fail, though I do not fear that it will. For my sake, Lettie," he added, in an undertone.

"Well, then, for your sake, Harry," she replied, with a low sigh. "Even if it should not give me back my sight, I shall only be as I am now."

They went out into the garden together; and, from the earnest, gentle way in which Harry

talked to Lettie, I know that he was preparing her for what she had to undergo. She did not want for courage in any circumstances, and I did not look for her being weak now.

The operation was performed during the following week. Doctor Philipson and Doctor Nash were both present, but Harry Crofts himself did it. His nerve was wonderful. Lettie behaved admirably too; indeed, nobody was foolish but myself, and when it was over I fainted. It was entirely successful; my sister has her sight, now, as good as I have. For several weeks we kept her in a darkened room, but she was gradually permitted to face the light, and the joy of that time is more than words can describe.

Harry Crofts soon after claimed her as his wife; and really, to say the truth, nobody had a better right to her. The report of the singular cure he had made, lifted him at once into consideration; and, as he made diseases of the eye his particular study, he is now as celebrated an oculist as Doctor Philipson himself: many persons indeed give him the preference. The operation, then thought so much of, is now of frequent

occurrence; Lettie's kind of blindness being no longer looked on as irremediable.

And this is all I need tell about our history; it is not much, or very romantic, but I am often asked about it, so there it is, Miss Belle.

From the Diary.

Wortlebank, August 1.

It has not been possible during the last few days since our return to snatch five minutes of uninterrupted leisure. There are so many people to come to Emmy's wedding that the preparations have to be on the largest scale. The 4th is the day, and the evening before, the house will be so full that Felix decides half a dozen more will not matter, so there is to be a dinner-party.

The bishop comes to perform the ceremony, but he only arrives that morning, and leaves after breakfast. Miss Rosamund Surtees is here already, and takes some trouble off my hands. Belle proclaims herself "worried off her feet," but it is easy to see that she enjoys the fuss with all her heart. The bridesmaids are to be Belle, Blanche Maynard, Clara and Ellen Surtees—four, Belle

to hold the gloves as chief she has announced, that there may be no mistake about it.

Emmy's presents are numerous, and many of them costly; Belle makes a display of them in the porch-room, and enjoys them far more than Emmy, who takes all that passes as if she were half in a dream; but she looks happy to the core of her heart. I shall be rather glad to be rid of Mr. Dover—he is a fidget, and is always taking Emmy away when she is wanted elsewhere. Bowerham has been fitted up charmingly. Belle says we only want Captain Dover to make all complete, but we cannot have him, he is in America now.

The signing of the marriage settlements is over; the dinner is over; the hall is heaped with boxes and bags, and all the house is in bed but myself and Felix: God bless our dear daughter, who is to be married to-morrow!

August 6.

The wedding is over, and Felix, Belle, and I have the house quite to ourselves: how still it is!

"I should not like weddings to happen every day," says Belle, and I agree with her.

It was a glorious morning, and a very, very pretty sight in the church. Emmy looked like a little queen when she was dressed; there was a perfect shadow of loveliness over her face, under her bride's crown and veil; and it was best of all to remember how deep and sincere a love there was between those two plighting their faith to each other for better for worse until their lives' end. There were very few tears shed; indeed, what was there to weep about? I never saw a happier, more satisfactory marriage.

The bishop was pleased and gracious, and proud of his grandchild too, but he was touched at last. Hannah said dear Emmy was the image of her mother.

Francis and Jean Maynard brought Blanche over and took her away yesterday, Steenie travelling with them as far as Eversley on his

return to school. Miss Rosamund Surtees left with her father and two young nieces; the quartette of bridesmaids was a very lovely group indeed. My maternal vanity was flattered several times that day by a prophecy that my Belle would grow up as beautiful as her elder sister; she may be as beautiful, but it will be in a different style. Her features have the exquisite modelling of my poor sister Isabel's, but her expression is so much her father's that often it makes me smile in spite of myself. However, she is a dear good child, and the joy of her mother's heart, which is beyond beauty of face, much as I love that too.

Felix and she and I took a long walk this afternoon through Wortlebank woods, and stopped to rest at Harry's cottage as we passed. We found all well, and Janet discussing with Hannah baby's next series of short coats. When we arrived at home, Belle asked me to go and sit in the porch-room, and have a story from the Portfolio; but I said no, I thought we had had romance enough for one while, and that I should enjoy nothing so much as sitting quiet by the library window, while Felix wrote his sermon for Sunday.

The sermon, however, on inquiry, proved to be ready, so we went into the greenhouse and discussed the plants; then we all three fell to suggesting alterations in the garden, on which gardener remarked that our young shrubs took "a deal of exercise;" and finally we went to dinner.

Belle warns me, however, that the Portfolio is by no means empty yet, and that when winter comes round again she shall reproduce it. For the present, it is to abide in the trash-closet—an ignominious receptacle;—but as she pronounces it "safe," I must submit.

The great event over, and a vista of quiet days lying before us, I may lock up my Diary too; for some time to come, I am not likely to have anything particular to chronicle.

THE END.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY SMITH, ELDER AND CO.,
LITTLE GREEN ARBOUR COURT, OLD BAILEY, E.C.

L6

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA
823 P242WO C001 v.3
Wortlebank diary : and some old stories
3 0112 088987083